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A SPIRITUAL RETREAT FOR PRIESTS

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A SPIRITUAL RETREAT FOR PRIESTS

WITHDRAWN

BY

BISHOP HEDLEY, O.S.B.

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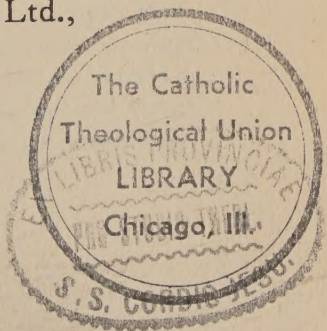

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Preface

SOME years before his death in November, 1915, Bishop Hedley wrote out this Retreat with the intention of publishing it. It is true that he had many times declared—once in the writer's hearing—his settled resolve to content himself with the issue of the already published volume, *Bishop Hedley's Retreat.* That volume contained—so he thought and said at the time—all that he had to say, or felt moved to say, as a guide to those who looked to him for spiritual direction.

But he gave many more Retreats in later years; and as the material accumulated, and fresh thought formulated itself, and an altogether independent series of meditations took shape, he found himself entrusted with a further and no less important message, which, he conceived, might prove of use to his brethren. The original plan of the book was to present, in a series of closely-connected discourses, the ideal of personal holiness God has a right to expect, and to exact, from the priests who serve him at His altars, in contrast with their many frequent and actual imperfections and their few, perhaps, but at all times possible, dangerous vices and deadly sins. His aim was to encourage high ideals and denounce low ideals by setting down both in vivid and strongly emphasized terms. There is evidence, however, that, when he had done this, he was afraid that his attitude and words might be misinterpreted.

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It might be said that, on the one hand, he was asking too much from priests, and, on the other, that he was denouncing vices that did not exist. He withheld the book from publication. And he did more than this. The MS. bears traces of a very ruthless revision. Some three or four discourses have been cut out altogether. In one of those retained, their are pencil-marks, for his own guidance in its delivery, removing certain over-emphasied paragraphs, which would be irrelevant—almost an insult—to the good priests before whom it was read. Some new discourses were planned and written out more or less in full to take the place of the deleted ones. Several additional passages, reasoned out in detail, were set down on paper to be introduced as corollaries or after-thoughts, almost all of them interpretary and explanatory, expressly designed—so we have a right to believe—to show more clearly his confident belief and loyal trust in his brother-priests.

It is the Retreat for Priests in its later form which is presented to the reader. He will find the original plan of the book practically unchanged. The contrasts have been toned down somewhat, but they are still there. On the one side we have meditations on God as our Father and Friend, on communion with Him in our hearts, on Prayer, Meditation and the Divine Office, on the Incarnation and the imitation of Christ; on the other, when we have considered—to use the Bishop's words—" that there is no beauty like the beauty of the soul in Grace; no beauty of flowers, no beauty of precious jewels, no beauty of the morning, of the noon, or of the evening, like the light of God's supernatural

presence ;—no beauty of the hills and forests, of the sea or of the firmanent, like the spiritual radiance of the Seven Gifts ;—no royalty of robe or coronet comparable to living Faith and Hope and queenly Charity," we turn to those " moments of our life when we may have been in God's sight as loathsome, dreadful, dead things " and consider the Degradation, the Outrage, and the Danger of Sin—and all this, more or less intimately, in connexion with the Office and Holiness and Dedication of the Priest.

For his own part the Editor would like it clearly understood that the Retreat, as it stands, is all and in every part the Bishop's own words—either set down in writing by himself or taken down in short-hand from his lips by the good sisters at Oulton Abbey. And he would like to thank the Lady Abbess very sincerely for having placed the transcript at his service.

J. C. Almond, O.S.B.

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I. INTRODUCTORY MEDITATION

Let us sit down, with serious purpose, with willing hearts, to the holy solitude and consecrated silence of our Retreat. The words that are written in this little book are not those of a teacher, of a professor, or of a preacher; they are the words of one who would try to enter into the hearts of his brethren, in order that those hearts may turn to God—turn to Him more effectively, more completely.

When you think what you are, what you are made for, what you have to answer for, I think you cannot help seeing very clearly that a Retreat is an incident that must regularly occur in your life. To live without Retreats would be foolish and dangerous. No one's soul is safe unless it gives itself a chance to reflect upon its ways, its acts, its dangers, its faults, and its sins. No matter how holy your work may be, no matter how hard you work for God, no matter how constantly your thoughts turn to Divine things and to the interests of those intrusted to you, there is always danger—danger of blindness, of worldliness, of sinful habits, of unfaithfulness to grace. It is a good thing to be employed in the work of God, in Christ's work. To be a true follower of Christ is another thing. There were some who prophesied in His name, during a long career, who deserved at last to be greeted with the crushing words—"I know you not. Depart from Me."

A Retreat is a kind of spiritual rest. It is not a bodily rest, nor a mental rest, though indirectly it may conduce to both. It is a rest from the work of life. Everyone has to carry on work, what our Lord calls trading with our Master's talents. It is a work, of mind, of heart, of body. It is the fulfilling of our duty in the world. It is made up, in various degrees, of prayer, business and recreation. By carrying it out according to our vocation, we carry out Almighty God's Will to promote the coming of His Kingdom. But a Retreat is a space of time during which we drop our work. We drop God's work for God's work of an unusual and special character. When the Apostles returned from the mission on which our Lord had sent them, they joyfully gathered round Jesus, and they related to Him what they had done, and taught. They had been successful, and they were in good spirits; we should not be wrong, probably, in thinking they were eager and anxious to go forth again. But what does our Lord say? "Come ye apart into a desert place and rest a little" (Mark vi, 31; Luke ix, 10). He did not say "Well done; go back; continue," but He said, "Come and rest." This rest is not to be a period of idleness or recreation. It is to be a cessation from work, but, at the same time, it is to be filled with strenuous application of a special kind. For ourselves, we cannot doubt that our Lord at this moment thus speaks to us. It is of the utmost moment that we should bring ourselves to accept this invitation. To enter Retreat, and to accept Our Lord's call to Retreat, are two different things. Many come to Retreat against their will,

or at least, in a spirit of unconcern and of indifference. There is no point in a Retreat unless one comes to it willingly and gladly. Some of us, no doubt, have to put a certain constraint upon ourselves. Nature makes some of us dislike a Retreat. When this happens the effort we make will be blessed by God. But we must be genuinely determined to make our Retreat and to make it well. To be merely passive is to make no Retreat. No words, no preacher, no book can get beyond the outermost barriers of our heart unless we open the gate for them. Think about that. If you come in with unconcern, you will go away as you came ; more estranged from God, more averse from the interior life. Some religious are absolutely afraid of a Retreat. They fear it may force them to think, that it will oblige them to make troublesome alterations in their life and routine. As St. Ambrose says, they have an uneasy apprehension that they may come to see something disturbing, and to fear for themselves (*ne incipiant scire quid timeant et timere ne pereant*). They fear that certain dim misgivings may take solid shape, and that a certain sense of laxness, of weakness, of sloth, and of self-indulgence will turn to be a matter of life and death. Really, there could be no more imperative reason for determining to make a thorough Retreat. And this, no doubt, most of us feel. But we are tempted to delay. We are loth to set about what we acknowledge in our inmost hearts to be the right thing to do—the only thing that can enable us to face the future and think of death without just apprehension. The opportunity is given us

now. Our Lord says, Come apart—and it is not so very difficult to rouse ourselves, to force ourselves and to determine, by His Holy Grace, to accept the loving invitation.

It is a Divine invitation, and, in some sense, a command. But God takes no means to enforce compliance. He leaves it to ourselves. He sends no heralds to proclaim His will, no ministers to drag us in, or to punish us if we disobey. This is His way as long as this life lasts. It is a way that should fill us with fear. For the time is fast coming on when there will be an invitation given to us which we shall be forced to accept. You can decline a Retrea ; but the summons of death and of judgement you cannot decline. Will there be anything more terrible, more fatal, more lamentable, in that hour, than to face the record of the many times when He said " Come," and you presumed on His silence, on His quiescence, and refused to come? Now there is hardly an occasion in our lives when the call of God is so weighty, so serious, so imperative as a Retreat. It is not too much to say that on it may depend your eternal salvation. There are numbers of us who have not given their whole hearts to God. This Retreat is to get them to that point. It is the only way to be safe. There are some, it is terrible to say it, living in the habit of deadly sin. There are some who are ever hovering on the brink of deadly sin, living in guilty proximity to the danger, neglecting prayer, and preferring the world's indulgences to their duty. By all that God is to you, do not refuse His call ! Stir up your soul to willingness. Say to Him, " Speak, O Lord, Thy servant heareth ! "

You must be convinced that He wishes to speak to you personally. Turn to Him with the fervent words of St. Augustine: "O Thou good and Almighty God, Who carest for every one of us as if he were Thy only care!" (*O Tu bone omnipotens, qui sic curas unumquemque nostrum, tanquam solum cures!* Conf., iii, 2.) Be sure He has words to say to you. Silent, secret, awful as He is, He has His ways of speaking to every heart in such a fashion that the heart cannot mistake Him. St. Augustine, after his conversion, began to learn what sort of communication was possible between a creature and its God. "O my God," he exclaims, "Thou didst call, Thou didst cry aloud, Thou didst break my deafness! Thou didst flash out, Thou didst shine as the sun, Thou didst kill my blindness! Thine odour did come upon me, and I drew in breath, and my being panteth towards Thee! (*Vocasti, clamasti, et rupisti surditatem meam. Coruscasti, splenduisti, et fugasti cæcitatem meam. Fragrasti, et duxi spiritum, et anhelo Tibi.* Conf., x, 27.) Something of this you may justly expect. Then, to use the words of St. Alfonso, "He will speak to you by such inspirations, such interior lights, such manifestations of His goodness, such sweet touches on your heart, such tokens of forgiveness, such experience of peace, such hopes of Heaven, such interior joy, such sweetness of His Grace, such loving and close embraces—in a word, such words of love—as are well understood by those souls whom He loves."*

On the other hand, I would fain believe that there

* Way of Salvation (American translation), p. 408, Centenary Edition.

is no need to dwell upon what might happen if one rejected the Divine invitation and withheld his willingness. "I did all I could for Babylon," said Our Lord in bygone times, "and she was not healed; I will abandon her." (*Curavimus Babylonem et non est sanata; derelinquamus eam.* Jer. li, 9). It is possible—and it is a possibility to which no one must shut his eyes—that a heart, too long unwilling, may grow hardened. St. Bernard wrote to Pope Eugenius III: "I fear for thee, Eugenius, lest the pressure of affairs, with the want of regularity in prayer and meditation, bring thee to hardness of heart; to a heart that doth not dread itself, doth not feel itself." (*Timeo tibi, Eugeni, ne multitudo negotiorum, intermissa oratione et consideratione, te ad cor durum perducat, quod seipsum non horret nec sentit.* S. Bernardus De Consideratione, I cap. 2.) That is St. Bernard's description of a hard heart; a heart that is dead to the fear which its own condition should inspire. You meet with Priests who are in the process of this kind of hardening. They are not, perhaps, what the world calls bad priests—yet. They are active and successful. But when you come to know them ever so little, you perceive in them a levity, an avoidance of solitude, a clinging to creatures and to the external, which indicate that they do not, perhaps dare not, find themselves alone with their own hearts. They can carry this on for a long time, and it will grow even easier—fatally easier—by being continued. But the time will inevitably come when their neglected hearts will assert themselves. Then, when death is near, all the fear that should have gently schooled them

in life to turn to their only Friend, will overwhelm them as if a mountain fell. "A hard heart," says the Holy Spirit, "shall fear evil at the last, and he that loveth the danger shall perish therein." Ecclus. iii, 27. For the hard heart loves danger, that is, gaily and lightly treads the dangerous path of life, and will not see or hear any signal or any warning. May God's holy Grace keep my heart sensitive to things above, things out of sight, and things within me!

One effect of our readiness and willingness to enter our Retreat will be an interested and intelligent appreciation of all that belongs to it. We shall cease to be passive, and begin to use all our faculties to profit by the persons, the rules, and the conditions. We shall not be as those who plant themselves down before a preacher and speculate, with a kind of sardonic amusement, as to whether he is likely to move them. "If he can, let him. If my book can touch me, I do not object." This is a poor and perverse spirit with which to begin a Retreat. What is the good of a preacher, of discourses, of a book? Only so much as we transmute into our own spiritual action. Sermons and considerations are like arrows shot against a stone wall, that fall blunted to the ground, unless our own spirit re-acts to their impact. In reality, almost any preacher or any book will serve as well as any other preacher or book, if a man brings a docile heart. There is first of all the act of humbling one's-self to listen. Priests are accustomed rather to be listened to than to listen themselves. They may be themselves more learned and more eloquent than the one who gives the Retreat. They may be tempted to think they

know all he is going to say—his order, his points, his rhetorical patches, and his little stories. But, for all that, it will be to their advantage to put themselves under him. He handles a weapon that cuts deeper than rhetoric or philosophy. He handles the two-edged sword of God's most holy word. It is forged and meant for the very purpose of reaching the innermost marrow of a man's spiritual being. You will hear the preacher speak of God. You will hear him mention the name of Jesus. You will hear the ancient yet ever new litany of Creation, Redemption, and Sanctification. He will speak of the work of the Holy Spirit. He will remind you of most Holy Mary and the Saints. Any of these spoken utterances taken into the heart and spirit of a hearer can kindle a flame of devotion and compunction. If they find a response in your heart, they heal and they sanctify ; if not, no eloquence or subtlety can hinder them from being sterile. If you make no effort on your own part, do not expect to be impressed. If you have the grace to respond, then it matters little who it is whose office it is to embody in spoken words the word that is God's own. " We speak externally," says St. Augustine , " He opens the intelligence, He inspires fear, it is He who moves us, He who edifies." (*Nos loquimur foras ; Ipse intellectum aperit, Ipse terret, Ipse movet, Ipse aedificat.*) Therefore let us bestir ourselves to value what is said by so great a Master, lest the discourses and the readings merely touch the outside and get no further, like the rain in the night that beats upon the windows, yet leaves no trace of itself thereon in the morning.

Again, the silence of the Retreat is a condition that is of very little use unless it is intelligently accepted. Even if a man keeps carefully the external silence, neither speaking nor being spoken to, there may be that noise and movement within his mind which will frustrate all the purposes for which silence is imposed. The silence of the Retreat is not idleness or vacancy. It is the stilling of sound in order that another sound, a sound little attended to, may be heard. It is a condition of God's speech to the soul: the external silence is intended to make the silence of the heart more deep, more intense, for a day or two. We are happy in having this opportunity of silence. There is far too little of it in our priestly lives. Let us think of the silence of Jesus Christ; of the silence of the nine months; the silence of the Infancy; the silence of Nazareth, the silence of the desert and of the mountain side; the silence of the Passion; the silence of Calvary. No man can draw near to God without much silence, because it is only when God's voice is heard that man gives God his whole heart. No man can save his fellow man without silence, because it is only in silence that we can make a proper use of suffering, and there is no apostolate without suffering. Come, then, with a good and prompt will to the silence and the solitude of the Retreat. Come with Jesus to pray on the lonely mountain, far from the common things of life, high up, near to Heaven. It will not only bring to you clearly the voice of God during this Retreat, but it will give you a lesson for your life; for a man who has once tasted of the fruit of sanctified and cherished silence will never again have to be

taught how powerful a force it is in the soul's Divine life.

How great a blessing will it be to your immortal soul if you can, once for all, succeed in grasping the true meaning of your human life. A man can never do this until he gets away from work, recreation, friends, and the dust of the world. He has to learn, first, that he is very solitary here below; next, that he is capable of very great things; and, thirdly, that he is very weak and helpless.

1. You are solitary. You must save your own soul, yourself. No one will help you, to any great extent. No one cares for you, in any very intimate way. The world, in its material sense—the world which your feet stand in, the world you feel your way about—is cold, silent, and relentless. Your coming did not affect it, your life-struggle does not make any difference to it, and it will soon give you a grave and obliterate you. Its seasons went on before you came, and will go on just the same when you are dead and forgotten. The human crowds which surround you are utterly indifferent to your good fortune or your trouble. A more intimate circle may feel some interest in you, and a band of friends and brothers still more near may truly love and sympathise with you. But most of them would bear to lose you without much disturbance or concern. And none of them can do much for you. You have an inmost life of duty, struggle, and danger, of personal sorrow and depression, in which no other mind or heart can share. Springs of our being lie far beneath the surface, and it is in these hidden depths that we make our success or consummate

our failure. You could not, if you would, admit your dearest friend, your wisest director, your most trusted superior, into the workshop where the essential work must be done. You are alone. Yet you cling to the material world, to your "friends," to your acquaintances, to men and women, good, bad and indifferent. You go there for help, amusement, consolation. Not all your experience of their futility and their limits has yet taught you to look elsewhere. This is in great measure because you have been afraid of silent and solitary thought. A Retreat is intended to make you feel that no one but God can come near enough to you to help you.

2. You know well that you have excellent powers and high aspirations. You are conscious that the best part of your nature, even with the grace that is poured upon you, is neglected, lost sight of, little used. There are, in your heart, such ideas as perfection, sanctity, the Cross, the sovereign love of God. Human hearts have been the theatre of these things—and yours is as good as any of them. At your best, you aspire to give yourself wholly to your God. Is your life to burn itself out before you have begun to live for Him?

3. But in order that such aspirations may be practical, and not mere sentiment, a Retreat must show us how weak we are and how needy. The most baffling character of human life is the alternation, in a man's heart, of lofty aspiration and base weakness. No man can come successfully out of this natural and insistent human conflict, except he who finds his way to lean on God alone. Man passes quickly through the changes of his life, dragged

down by base appetites, the sport of passion, stained by pride, weighed down by sloth—yet with vehement demands for faith and for hope, for purity, for secure consolation, for confidence, for light and for love. How blind has hitherto been my life! If I have seemed to be happy, it has been chiefly because I have kept my eyes shut, or have intoxicated my senses. "Thou hast left the fountain of wisdom. . . . Learn (at length) where is prudence, and where is virtue; where is understanding . . . where is the light of the eyes and peace" (Baruch iii, 12 seqq.).

Points of Mental Prayer.

1. Place yourself in the presence of Jesus calling you. As truly as He called His apostles into solitude, He now calls you into Retreat. "Come apart," He says, "into a desert place and rest a little." He who laid your Priesthood upon you, whose holy Name you have preached to so many, whose blessed work you have tried to do—now, solicitous for your own soul, calls you apart to think and resolve. Make Acts (1) of adoration of your Divine Master, (2) of gratitude for His solicitude about yourself, (3) of fervent desire to obey this special call, to understand it, and to profit by it. I come, O my Lord, I come! — to Thee, to Thy light, to Thy inspirations, to Thy guidance.

2. Become conscious of what He is saying to you. He calls you to Retreat, to solitude, to silence; to special prayer; to the overcoming of yourself. Think of God's mighty calls, of God's sweet calls,

in the Old and New Testament; the call of Abraham, so full of fate; of Moses, so full of mercy; of the leaders, the princes, the prophets; of the calls of Christ to those that are heavily burthened. To what is He calling *me*? I know. It is to His heart and His breast. I know not—for I must wait till the end of this Retreat in order to be sure what it is He asks of me.

Acts: 1. I trust Thee, O my Saviour! I am ready. I will take the means which Thou dost offer me; 2 I know that Thou wilt speak to me—arouse me—enlighten me—comfort me! Whatever Thou shalt ask of me, that I will do, by Thy Holy Grace.

3. Resolve to accept the Retreat; to accept the silence; to accept all inconveniences; to enter with good-will into the exercises. Holy Spirit of God, Spirit of Wisdom and of Understanding, fill my unready heart! Holy Mary, Immaculate Mother of God, calm all my being, that I may hear Jesus speak.

II. COR AD DEUM

On the first day of a Retreat, the soul should make a sustained effort to get into the presence of God.

In our spiritual life, let us hope, we are not unaccustomed to seek this holy presence. It may be that we have arrived, by His Grace, at a certain facility of recollection, by which we frequently turn to Him, in prayer, in work, in temptation and in suffering. But in this practice, of the realization of God—a practice which is in a certain sense the whole of this Christian interior life—there are always fresh and striking advances possible to be made. The time of a Retreat is a great opportunity for making discoveries in this greatest of all sciences, partly because God reveals Himself to those who seek Him, and partly because the abrupt cessation of ordinary sights and sounds, of work, recreation and company, tranquillises and awes the soul—as when one finds himself under the silent starry sky at night.

The meditations of this first morning may not, at first sight, seem to have a very direct bearing on our advancement in virtue. But there is no real improvement in a man's life without increased spirituality. To rub off our faults is no use—or rather, is not possible—unless we purify our heart and nature. Besides, we may hope that our heavenly Father intends to do much more for us than merely to show us our faults. This He will do, and perhaps in a

more startling fashion than we now anticipate. But He calls us, without doubt, to some decided advance in our soul's spiritual life. At the beginning of a Retreat we do not know what shape this Grace will take. Even at the end we do not always know what has come to pass. But we must be persuaded, that if we join willingly in the Retreat and take all the means that are offered to us, something will certainly happen. We shall have more light, some strong impulse, some courage of resolution, or some new visitation of compunction, that may alter our lives very much. We must not, therefore, be impatient at the beginning of a Retreat. The visitation of God will come as the result of orderly meditations and exercises, carried through in a spirit of childlike docility.

But the visitation will certainly come. Let us not yield to the temptation of looking upon the Retreat as a mere incident of routine observance, or as a mere detail of ecclesiastical discipline. Let no one say, I have made dozens of Retreats, and I do not know that this one will make much difference to me. It is quite possible that, if one enters a Retreat in this spirit, not much good may come, but rather an increased aversion from things spiritual. It is possible that our past Retreats may have suffered from the same cause. But it is certain that no good and genuine Retreat has been without God's visitation. Probably you could verify this if you looked back over your life. But even if you could not, it is true all the same. In this present Retreat, our heavenly Father, in His mercy, has plans for your well-being, designs upon you, Graces for you, which are dependent

upon your goodwill in making the Retreat, but which will not be frustrated except by your deliberate ill-will and indifference.

How can I get nearer to the thought of my God?

It is always touching to read the passage in Exodus where Moses is related to have begged to see the Face of God. God had been justly angry with His people for their lapse into idolatry and their worshipping of the Golden Calf (Ex. xxxii). Moses had spoken to Almighty God with a boldness which seems to show how well he understood the fatherly solicitude of the Lord of heaven and earth. "Either forgive them," he exclaimed, "or strike me out of the Book of Life." Soon afterwards, whilst the Almighty still thought it necessary to keep the people under His displeasure—whilst the Tabernacle was pitched in Horeb, and no one knew what was going to happen—Moses, the mediator, watched by all the multitude, went up to the Tabernacle. Then the Pillar of Cloud came down, and stood at the door of the Tabernacle and spoke to Moses. For this awful Pillar of leading and protection was no mere cloud of the air, but was the Angel of the Lord, the representation of the Messias to come, an anticipation of the Incarnation itself. Therefore, as It spoke, the people bowed themselves to the ground, as they stood watching at the doors of their tents. For, as the sacred text goes on, "Jehovah spoke to Moses face to face, as a man is wont to speak to his friend." Then Moses said to the Lord, "Show me Thy face that I may know Thee; show me Thy glory." As if he said, We are about to travel the wilderness—to make our way through many

dangers to the land which Thou hast promised. Show me Thy face that I may never doubt Thee! Show me Thy glory, that I may never fear or faint! But he was asking for the impossible. "No man can see My face and live." Man, with his natural powers, can never look upon the face of God. He can know Him, but only the light of glory can show him His face. To see would be to die; and only by death can human nature see.

It must often happen to a man of goodwill, during this pilgrimage of life, so dangerous, so difficult, and so wearisome, to wish he could see God. O that we could take hold of Him in some more immediate fashion than by painful reasoning—by the slow disentangling of inadequate imaginations! Is there no mental vision that can be called His "face"? Is there no spiritual realization of Him that can give our faculty the shock of a thing seen or felt? For it seems to us that all would be well if we could thus realise God. We know Him to be the most momentous living fact; the most mighty force; the most profound personality; the most loving and present Father and Friend. We can understand His necessary existence, His presence in every place, His awful purity, His absolute knowledge, His beneficent Creation, His sovereignty and His providence. Why cannot we put all this into one overpowering intuition, and think of God even as we think of a living earthly prince or a friend whom we know? We are inclined to cry out with the Hebrew leader: The desert is perilous, the promised land is afar off—why cannot we see Thy face!

We must not be impatient. We are here below

"in via," and we have to walk by reason and by faith. We must make the most of our faculties; we must make the most of our strong gift of faith. It is, in fact, quite possible to obtain for ourselves a kind of vision of God, permanent and effectual, such as will deeply and constantly influence our life.

The truth is, we look in the wrong direction. We look, as with bodily eyes, over material distances, to earthly horizons, where our vision stops, and where our imagination will not carry us very far. We long to see beyond. We imagine visions, revelations, apocalyptic mysteries, terrible and glorious experiences of Saints. Not for us these things—at least, not yet. But we have something, did we but know where to find it. We omit to look within ourselves. We neglect to listen to what is going on in our very breasts. Do you think it possible that God could have made you, and not provided for communion between Himself and you. Could He possibly have left you without some permanent presence that would effectively keep Him before you, if you gave yourself fair play? Let us use the words of St. Augustine—words born of experience and bearing the evidence of vital reality. "What is that," he cries in his meditation—"what is that thing which shines through all my being, and which beats upon my heart without hurting it—and I tremble, and I glow. I tremble, being so unlike Him—and I glow because I am so like Him!" (*Quid est illud quod interlucet mihi, et percutit cor meum sine laesione, et inhorresco et inardesco. Inhorresco in quantum Ei dissimilis sum—inardesco in quantum similis Ei sum.* Confess xi, cap. 9).

It would not be true to say that a human soul is part and portion of God. From the Infinite, every finite being is substantially and personally distinct. But it is no exaggeration to say that we have in our being the continual stream and vibration of God's energy. It is no exaggeration to say that, as there is nothing above God, so there is nothing outside of Him, nothing altogether apart from Him, nothing beyond Him and nothing beneath Him. (*Deus est supra quem nihil, extra quem nihil, sine quo nihil, ultra quem nihil, infra quem nihil.* In Speculat, cap. 33, Tom., ix). He alone can create; He alone can conserve; therefore my being is pervaded by a force which is God's own and proper force. Let it cease—let it be interrupted, and my being is extinguished in nothingness. God interpenetrates even inert matter; but much more mightily spirit. The energy or force which makes my spirit to be spirit (and not matter) is, in a very strong and real sense, God's own Spirit. That Spirit, in the beginning, when the moment came, breathed upon the face of the abyss, and order and life began. The breath of its potency still calls forth souls from nothing, and enfolds each soul, more subtle and penetrating than any vital air, all through the periods of its existence. "The spirit of God made me," says Job, "and the breath of the Almighty gave me life" (Job xxxiii, 4). To no force is a man indebted for his very existence as he is to God. No energy is so present to him, so absolutely close to the springs of his being, so absolute, as the God who made him.

It is hardly a fancy to insist that a man may

detect the great Being of God moving in his soul. I say "detect," because, no doubt, some effort of scrutiny is needed in order to make His presence out. The Face of God does not, as it were, importune us, bear down upon us like the sun. To see it is the effect of contemplation. But what does one read in one's own soul? By reflection, one becomes conscious of the presence of a certain light. It is a light which certainly does not exist outside of human intelligence. Yet it irradiates the whole universe. It enables you and me to see, in the universe of created things, what the things themselves never could offer to you. It is the light of the abstract and the universal; the light that is called by the names of Truth and Justice; the Light of Goodness; the light of eternal principles and fundamental reason. This spiritual light illuminates not only your spirit, but the spirit of every man that is in the world. It is of the same nature in all. No one can doubt that this points to a single common source; a source in which light is primarily found; a source to which, by excellence, the light belongs. So that my "reason"—to describe that light in one word—and your reason are, both of them, a participated similitude of the primary, uncaused, infinite, personal intelligence from which all reason's endowments stream out as from a central orb of light. It is good to realise this. It is as if one suddenly realized that all earthly light was really the sun's light—direct light, reflected light, the mid-day glare, the grey twilight, the faint streaks and threads of the dark night, the incandescence of the mineral, the intense pulsation of the electric current. "For of

Him, and by Him, and in Him are all things." When I move, when I breathe, when I speak, when I think —God does these things in me more truly than I myself. Provided that we save the personal distinction of the Creator from the creature, it is not possible to assert too strongly the presence of God in each man's life, and especially in his intellectual life. Let me close my eyes to all things else if I can only tremble and glow with this inward vision of my God.

But this is not all. The communion of the eternal light could not be the only thing in common between myself and my God. No intellectual power can be without intellectual desire. No mind can see with the sight of intelligence, but it must also reach out with a special and unique longing. Its light enables it to get beyond space, time and sense ; and when it has looked over into the abyss where no bounds can be, then it has taken the first step on a road that must land it at God's feet, or it must ever fall short of happiness. We are not here referring to the Beatific Vision. Left to nature, it would seem that man, merely by virtue of his reason, must have God, in some way. When the fever of life's passion is over, and the soul can no longer be kept in blindness and intoxication ; when the body has dissolved, and a fresh dispensation has begun that is to last for ever, then the soul must have God, or she will gradually exhaust all possible happiness and come to the misery of unsatisfied longing. This is the way a man is made. This is his condition—this intimate dependence on his Creator. Even amidst all the mists and stumblings of passion

and folly, the soul never quite loses the capacity to feel that she was made for a great destiny. Even amidst the degradations of sense and in the oblivion of surfeited feeling, there are moments when a man knows that it is not so much God's commandment that he is breaking, but God's image that he is wrecking. The well-known words of St. Augustine find a response even in the sinner's breast—" Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our heart cannot rest until it rest in Thee ! " (*Fecisti nos ad Te, et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in Te.*)

Thoughts of this kind should help to bring us face to face with our God. It is what He desires—that we should deeply and firmly believe in His fatherly presence. As St. Augustine found out in his own experience, His hand is always stretched out to help a soul to reach Him. " Thou dost draw," he says, " Thou dost rescue, from the great deep of darkness and confusion, the soul that seeketh Thee, the soul that thirsteth after Thee ; the soul that saith from its heart, I have sought Thy face ; Thy face, O Lord, have I sought ! " (*Eruis ex hoc immanissimo profundo quaerentem Te animam et sitientem delectationes Tuas, et cujus cor dixit Tibi, Quaesivi vultum Tuum, vultum Tuum, Domine, quaesivi !*)

But men will not be persuaded to look upon God as one who loves them. To most of them He is afar off, in some lofty heaven, hidden in glory, silent and inaccessible ; unaffected by our vicissitudes, unheeding our prayer, even waiting and watching to catch us in our weaknesses and sins. We do not neglect Him ; we fear Him, we speak about Him, preach about Him, pray to Him, and school our-

selves to good behaviour in His sight. And with all this, we hold aloof from Him and avoid Him ! God is not driven away from us even by our coldness ; and it is something at least that we should fear Him. But no man's soul can ripen spiritually unless he learns to feel that God is his true Father and his only Friend. There is a familiar passage in the early pages of the Old Testament which always seems to me to light up with a strange pathos and appeal the stern and crowded story of the Hebrew Exodus. Moses stood for the second time on the summit of Mount Sinai. The new tables of stone, destined to receive once more the law of the Lord, were with him, and he awaited the coming of Jehovah. And the Lord came down in the clouds, and Moses invoked Him thus : O Jehovah, Jehovah, God ! merciful and gracious, patient and of much compassion, and true ! (Exodus xxxiv, 6.) The Vulgate gives these words as the words of Moses. But it is almost certain, from a comparison of the parallel passage in the book of Numbers (Numbers xiv, 17) that they are the words of God Himself. They are His solemn proclamation of His state and title. In this sense they are quoted, not only by Moses himself in the book of Numbers, but in many passages of the Prophets and the Psalms. For it is thus that God would desire to be thought of by the creatures He has made. It is thus, even amidst the terrors of Sinai, and in the very institution of the law of fear and death, that He declares His own essential and inalienable character, He is always the Creator, the Master and the Judge. But much more is He gracious, solicitous, kind and true. His purpose is to be

bounteous, showering the favours of nature and Grace upon His children. His very being makes Him watch over and guard and keep them. He cannot but be compassionate to them in their weakness, and merciful even when they sin. And He is absolutely true, faithful, loyal and trustworthy, never deserting any soul that turns to Him, and standing by them when all other friends have failed, and all created resources have melted away.

It is this Lord and Master, this Father and Friend,that a man finds in his own breast. It is this ever-present, this real, this immortal sense of the Divinity that it is the great treasure of man's life to possess, the great object of all his labours to guard from extinction or diminution. It is this perennial spring of faith, trust, and security that St. Ignatius the Martyr seems to refer to, when he says: I feel within me living water, that saith to me, Go unto the Lord! (*Sentio in me aquam vivam, dicentem, Vade ad Dominum.*) It is this sense of God that is the very foundation of the spiritual life. And if spiritual writers insist that it is more essential to feel that God is our Father, than to remember that He is our Judge, this is certainly His own will and desire. The revelation of St. Gertrude expresses this great truth: "A man's unwavering trust in Me, and his faith in My desire to aid him on all occasions, act so agreeably and violently on My loving Heart, that from such a loving soul I cannot withhold My favour." And Blosius, with his wonted caution, says: "Provided we do not neglect to do what is in our power, with an upright intention, we may

confide in His protection without measure and without end.

Points for Mental Prayer.

1. Look into yourself—into the citadel of your being—into your immortal soul; and see God there. He is there as your Creator, as the preserver of your existence, as the light of your being, the object and end of your life, your Father and your Friend.

Make Acts (1) of Adoration, (2) of Welcome, (3) of Thanksgiving and Joy, (4) of Dedication. Use such words as those of St. John Berchmans: "O God of my heart; centre of all my affections; my only good! In time and for eternity I rest in Thee alone!"

2. See God in your soul more particularly as the loving and solicitous Father and Friend Who desires to be in constant communication with you as Father with child, Friend with friend. Then (1) Regret. Too late have I loved Thee, O beauty ever old and ever new! (*Sero Te amavi, O pulchritudo tam antiqua, tam nova.* Aug. Confess x, 27.). (2) Long to know Him better. "In Thy pity, teach me, O Lord my God, what Thou art to me." (*Dic mihi per miserationes Tuas, Domine, quid sis mihi!* Confess. i, 5.) (3) Offer you whole heart. "Here is my heart, O my God, here is my heart, which Thou hast taken pity on in the abyss of its miseries!" (*Ecce cor meum, Deus meus, ecce cor meum, quod miseratus es in imo abyssi.* Confess. ii, 4.) "O my love, on Whom I lean and faint, that I may be strong!" (*Amor meus in Quem deficio ut fortis sim.* Confess. iii, 6).

3. Wonder that you have sought in other things either strength or happiness. I have wandered far from my God! I have gone after the false, the barren, the fleeting, the base! I have leaned upon my pride! I have wearied myself with the seeking of self. Pray for a heart such as the Angelic Doctor describes: "A watchful heart; a noble heart; a right heart; and a free heart." (*Cor pervigil; cor nobile; cor rectum; cor liberum.*)

III. COR PERVIGIL

If God is, to me, so primary, so vital, so elevating, so solicitous—then what am I doing ? St. Augustine cries out : " Tell me what Thou art doing ? " (*Dic mihi per miserationes Tuas, Domine Deus meus, quid sis mihi*, Confess, i. 5.). We have been trying to consider what *God* is to us. Now what are *we* to do ? St. Gertrude prayed that Almighty God would teach her what He would have her do. He replied : " I desire nothing from thee but a devoted heart." A devoted heart ! That is a very wide word and a very deep word, too. The response to God must come from the heart of man. We may do what we like for His cause and His Kingdom ; yet if we do not give our heart we do not answer His call. What is meant by the heart ? It is all our activity—our rational activity, our consciousness, our meditation, determination, aspiration. If our heart is devoted, then our whole being is devoted ; our mind is devoted, our passions are devoted—for they are directed to Almighty God—our energies are devoted. *Omnia interiora mea*, as the Psalmist said, are anxious to respond to His call. It is readiness of heart : *Paratum cor meum, Deus, paratum cor meum* (Psal. cvii, 1).

St. Thomas says a man's heart, as to his God, ought to have four qualities : *Cor pervigil, nobile, rectum, liberum :* a watching or attentive heart, a noble heart, a right heart, and a free heart (Raccolta, p. 390).

1. *A watching heart.* My heart should watch unto God. Some hearts *have* so watched. We cannot read the lives of the Saints without knowing that. It is a touching picture that of a Father of the desert, sitting in solitude, in a poor little hut on a vast stretch of sand, under the burning skies, his heart constantly waiting on Almighty God. These recluses cultivated this constant attention to God. They were called to contemplation. And how constant it was ! They did some work with their hands —made baskets to earn a coin or two for their support. But all day they watched, most of the night, too ; in the darkness, and when the sun was up again they were still watching. They were the watchers of the skies, looking for the appearance of Him Whom they loved. He was present to them in everything that happened : in the changing light of dawn, in the shadows of the dark, in the voices of animals and birds, in the actions and employments of the day. Their hearts were ever raised to God.

What has my life been ? Look back and see. You will find there distraction, attachment, forgetfulness, offences. Look at your youth. It was not, perhaps, in a particularly guilty way ; but you sought pleasure, you were full of worldly ideas. You were not over careful about offending God. You had your ambitions—too secular to be quite praiseworthy, and your work—not always dedicated to God.

The Saints found that God can be heard. We cannot read the Preface to the Holy Rule of St. Benedict without knowing this. *Quotidie clamat*, he

exclaims; God cries out to us every day: *Quid dulcius nobis hac voce Domini invitantis nos?* What can be sweeter than the voice of the Lord inviting us? He tells us to listen. It needs attention, even rapt attention (*attonitis auribus*). This voice must be a reality or the Saints would not have felt it. The voice of God will come to us, on one condition. We must be *watching*, with continual attention. I do not mean that we must labour to attain this all at once. We must learn it by degrees. Our whole day is cut up by prayer, our duties, our recreations. A time like this is an occasion to think of God, but do not take only these occasions; take some time before and afterwards to think of Him, so you will broaden it out and cover the day by degrees. This is what we should aim at doing. When the clock strikes and our various duties call us, these points will enable us to think of God, and by degrees we shall extend our thought till the whole day is covered. In those Egyptian deserts where there is such want of water, they have now built enormous dams on the Nile, and in dry times they draw off the water in rivulets, which, in a sense, practically cover the whole desert with water. So we must cover the whole of our day. We must have a watchful heart, also, to see what God has done for us in the past. What holy teaching we have had from the beginning! In our infancy our mother taught us; since then we have had good teachers of all sorts—priests, books, sermons, directors. We do not realize this till afterwards. Our prevailing feeling has been the tedium of it. Yet who gave us all this?

The words we heard and read were in very truth

the words of God. St. Augustine owed much to his mother, yet he says: "Whose words were these but Thine, which through my mother, Thy good servant, Thou didst sing in mine ears. . . . O truth! O truth! How the intimate marrow of my soul sighed after Thee!" (*Et cujus erant nisi Tua verba illa per matrem meam, fidelem Tuam, quod cantasti in aures meas. . . O veritas, O veritas, quam intime etiam tunc medullae animae meae suspirabant Tibi.* Confess. iii, 6.) We have had God's constant call, innumerable aspirations, good thoughts, desires, resolutions, perseverance. Who gave all this? Why do we not watch more and more? He is close to us, ready for us. Our heart must watch better, try to understand God better. Like a science, the knowledge of God reveals something more every day—to a student. Not to a man who does not use mental prayer—who does not spend serious hours in contemplation, who is impatient of Divine occupation, silent thought, aspirations pressed with some intensity. *Noverim Te;* O my God, give me Grace to know Thee! O Beauty, ever ancient, ever new, too late have I known Thee!—this is our cry as we get on in life. We have never seriously taken up the "study" of God, or kept it up. Am I running the chance of spoiling my life? I hope I shall never be an apostate. But if there is one thing that leads to apostacy, it is the neglect of God—of an habitual, face to face, intimate, real devotion to my Heavenly Father. He wants this devotion. He once told St. Teresa, He would speak to many more souls but the world makes so much noise in their hearts that His voice could not be heard (*Way of Salvation*, p.

264). It does not need a very august or illustrious world to do this. Some of us live in a very sordid, childish world—yet it occupies our heart. Let us not make our home with folly as a companion, but seek wisdom and take her to dwell with us. Then God will be with us and He will speak to us. And we can say with the wise man: "When I go into my house I shall repose myself with her: for her conversation hath no bitterness, nor her company any tediousness, but joy and gladness (Wisdom viii, 16).

2. *Cor Nobile.* Hardly any man thinks highly enough of himself. Think of the prerogative of communion with God that we possess, hearing His voice, friendship with Him. If God is our Friend we must be noble. Friendship implies a certain equality. We cannot be friends with a stone or with one of the brutes. There must be appeal and response, something in common, between friends. He has said: *vos amici mei estis*; it is a wonderful thing to be a friend of God. But if Almighty God wanted us to be so near to Him, why did He hamper us with this body, why did He not make us pure spirits, able to know Him directly? I cannot treat here the philosophy of creation. But we may assume that, if there be creation, there must be probation, or else no merit and no glory. Now this body of ours—viz., the limiting and dragging conditions of our existence—does not inevitably limit love or drag to sin. These conditions may do so; but, on the other hand, by the condition of resistance or friction, they kindle intensity of love and service. We can see plainly that in our knowledge of God, it is not

success that is meritorious, but *effort*. He might have made creatures whom it would cost nothing to know Him. I cannot say what a probation would have been to a spirit not limited, or strong against temptation. But certainly it would not have had the peculiar intensity of a human sanctity. Hence these limiting and dragging conditions of our existence add to our nobility. It is the effort we have to make that merits the glory. The will and the reason are brought into action, and the will and the reason make the man. Moreover, our nobility is the greater because Grace comes to the aid of our reason and our will. Grace brings with it a nobility of a very high order—the supernatural, and opens the door to a marvellous world, the Kingdom of Heaven and the face to face vision of God. But, on this earth, it does not save us or free us from a contest. Indeed, it makes the contest a matter of life and death, and, if we win, the victory is the more splendid; if we lose, the defeat is the more utter and complete.

But here we have the human heart, endowed with natural powers and gifts which set it on a kind of level with the infinite intelligence and will, elevated by Grace to a kinship with God such as not even the highest seraph could have by mere nature—we have it placed as in a lion's den or in a fiery furnace. It is either all or nothing with it, eternal life or eternal death. And the first thing you and I have to do is to rise to the call, and responsibility. We *can* do so, because God is beside us. As Isaias says, God's presence is especially in two places—the highest heavens and the soul of a man (*In excelso et in sancto habitans, et cum contrito et humili spiritu.*

lvii, 15). In the heavens He reigns in cloudless effulgence. In the heart of man He upholds His own nobly made creature, and His own cause. My purpose is a Kingdom, a crown, eternity. If I fail, I fail my God, my heavenly Father. I give my spirit, my God-made heart to the beasts. I deliver a soul to be trampled in the dust. I throw away Grace, as a fool or a drunken man might fling his gold into a sewer. And as I cannot kill my spirit, but only ruin it, I devote it to an eternity of ruin and death. It will be a cowardly and a mean nature that will not brace itself up to avoid this. Or else it will be an ignorant, thoughtless, easy-going nature—the sort that does not realize the responsibility of such a soul—such a heart.

3. *Cor rectum.* This is one of St. Thomas' theological words. What is a *right* heart ? The right, or righteous heart, is the heart that goes straight by the rule that shines in heaven and earth wherever God is known. God's existence creates a rule of right and wrong. That rule is not a gross or material measure, but a conception of the mind, formed by my knowledge of God and of man, and of their inter-relation. The right is not a mere arbitrary order of Almighty God. The ground of the just, the good, the honest, and the true is in His Being. Man being created—and man's heart—the right and just being of God, by the necessary play of its perfection and its absolute truth, sets up in a man's heart a created reflex of the Divine, incorruptible, everlasting Right. God is *justus et rectus* (Deut. xxxii, 4). Man is *simplex et rectus* (Job i, 1). Ezekiah is stated to have " wrought the good and the right

and the true before the Lord his God" (2 Paralip. xxxi, 20).

When the human heart fails in righteousness, it turns away from Almighty God. It has that fatal power. How often have we deviated from the right and taken the wrong! The wrong what? The wrong rule. The rule of passion, pride, pleasure, self and sloth. There is a constant pressure in these directions on the weak and inconstant heart. Yet how good God has made these hearts of ours! How they respond to the great Rule! How they feel the great Rule—as if it ever and again made itself seen through the mists of life! How they suffer a strange remorse when they deviate! O my heavenly Father! All my good instincts are Thy voice! How often hast Thou moved me to detest impurity—to curb my appetites—to draw back from worldly friends—to check my pride and vanity! For all the straying, the iniquity of my weak heart, I ask Thy pardon. Create a clean heart in me. Renew a right spirit within my bowels. My heart is too akin to Thy Being, too full of Thine own character, too much of Thine own handiwork to launch itself upon the sea of wrong. If it does it will be wrecked. For what is right is alone what is secure—because Thou art the Right. On the sea of wrong there is no port—only coasts of black and inexorable rocks that await the poor heart which trusts itself on that fatal ocean.

4. *Cor liberum.* The heart of a child of God must be free. You will say, How can it be free when it is bound by its very creation to conform itself to the absolute pattern, the law and rule of all—to absolute

goodness and absolute purity? Could there be a bondage more complete, more unbreakable? There is no need to answer the question. True freedom is a bondage to Truth and Right. True freedom constrains a being to be where its happiness is. With rational beings this strain is not compulsory, not invincible. We have free-will. And it is a good, beneficent and, on the whole, delightful constraint. Any law or command or threat or promise that helps it helps real liberty. But, except our Heavenly Father, and the law of Christ, and the Grace of Christ, almost everything around the heart is in a league to turn it from its God—almost everything, living or inanimate, would be a tyrant and wants to forge fetters for it. This is the meaning of what spiritual writers say about creatures—that they enslave the heart. Money, ambition, sensuality, dishonesty—these are names for slavery. Thank God we have not gone very far in their service. But we endure a modified servitude to these things. There is a longing, a tasting and trying; perhaps, an occasional grievous fall. How few have a really free heart! We are well aware where duty and God's love call us. But although we see we ought to give Him this or that, we cannot make the resolutions required of us:—*Occasions*—we like them too much; *Slackness in spiritualities*—we cannot overcome our love of ease; *Regular meditation*—we are fettered by our laziness; *Waste of time*—we enjoy it too much; *Serious entanglements with money*—we cannot make up our minds to put it right or let it go; *Talking against superiors and brethren*—we have a heavy and deadly habit, which

our souls drag like a shackle, but which they cannot resolve to get rid of.

Points for Mental Prayer.

1. Contemplate your Heavenly Father rejoicing in the human heart He has given you. No doubt it was marred by original sin. But there is Grace and Redemption, and the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ. God gives you this heart to burn before Him all your life, as a lamp before the altar. Pray that it may burn always—every day, by much and regular prayer; all the year round, in spite of labour and distraction; even to the day of your death. Pray that the fire may never go out, by mortal sin. O my Heavenly Father, may I never forget Thee, lose sight of Thee, wander away from Thee! May I cherish this heart and soul, so impregnated with Thee! To Thee I belong. Of Thee may I be worthy. Thee may I learn to know more and more. Do Thou possess me, and all my thoughts, words and acts, till the day of my death?

2. What is it that makes my heart go wrong? Is it want of thought? Then I must turn myself more to an inward life. Is it sensuality? Then I must enter on a course of determined contest and mortification. Is it this person or that? Then I must free myself at whatever cost. Is it vanity? laziness? money? independence? Then I must free myself. O my Heavenly Father, it is surely worth while! If not for eternity's sake, then for Thy sake, Who hast made me for Thyself. *Cor mundum crea in me Deus, et spiritum rectum innova in visceribus meis. Psal.* l, 12).

IV. SIN

It is not very difficult, even outside of a Retreat, to arrive at a certain warmth towards God. There is so much that we—our souls, that is, and the better part of us—have in common with God, that it does not need deep or long reflection, with most of us, to stir up our feelings in His regard. His goodness, His fatherly solicitude, His unique friendship for us, combined with the ever-present consciousness of His majesty, His power, and our absolute need of Him, soon take hold of the heart, and fill us with a certain resolution to prefer Him, to serve Him, to love Him. We say to ourselves, Why should I not make my life a wise life and a happy life, and be a friend of my Creator ? Then, suddenly, like a chill, there seizes upon us the thought of Sin. Sin, we perceive, or think we perceive, is absolutely unavoidable. We know, of course, that we have God's Grace and our free-will. But our knowledge of the past and present, of human nature, of history, and of our own career, makes it impossible not to see that no life can escape the blight of sin. We have sinned, we are sinners now, and sinful we shall be to our dying day. The warmth of our turning to God, in our better moments, or in this retreat, it seems to us, can only be a transient mood. We shall never keep it up. The moment we get up out of our mood of meditation, the moment we step into the world after our Retreat, we shall sin again

as we have sinned already. Why set much value on a feeling which will not, and cannot, last ? It is this diffidence, or despair, that makes so many priests averse from taking pains in a Retreat.

The truth is, that sin is not by any means such an obstacle to love as a hasty glance at life would seem to show. Past sin need be no obstacle—rather, a help. Future sin must necessarily be left to the future ; no man has to answer for the future, except in so far as he makes the future. In regard to Sin, therefore, the chief question is the present. But we cannot afford to pass sin by. No Retreat can dispense with a full and serious meditation on Sin. No spirituality is of any solidity or depth that does not rest on genuine sorrow for sin. No day of our lives but we must repeat and reiterate contrition. Sometimes, in a Retreat, a soul has to awaken to contrition. There are those who are in mortal sin—even priests. There are more who are not unacquainted with mortal sin, who fall frequently, who cherish habits that are dangerous, who refuse to give up the occasions of sin—and who, with all this, are very calm, indifferent, and unconcerned.

There are two tempers in the life of a man which, as they do or do not prevail in it, will either save him or wreck him. One is Indifference to sin ; the other is Sensitiveness to sin. The hearts of many of us are lamentably and dangerously indifferent to sin. To alter and banish this indifference is one good object of a Retreat.

No one can be indifferent to sin who has the feeling of a son towards his Heavenly Father. Because, quite apart from the degradation involved

in sin, or the personal damage and danger where eternity is concerned, sin is violently against the wishes, the plans, the dispositions, the loving solicitude of God. The truth is that God is not merely the august Being against whom the sinner lifts his hand, but is the Father Whose office and occupation it is to guard His child just from the ruin of sin. For this He created us, for this He redeemed us, for this He endowed us with ineffable qualities and gifts, for this He moves all things and pervades the living universe. We cannot apply words of human solicitude literally to the most simple and pure Godhead. But all that can be expressed in the fondest terms of human desire, preoccupation and affection does exist, infinitely refined and without alloy of imperfection, in what we may call, by analogy, the heart of God. And we are not wrong when we say that His heart is wrung when, in spite of all He can do, these wilful beings of ours turn away from Him and disappoint Him, by doing their utmost to wreck all His generous and happy Providence. Let us recall the touching parable of Isaias (Ch. v, 1): "My beloved had a vineyard on a hill in a fruitful place. And he fenced it in, and picked the stones out of it, and planted it with the choicest vines, and built a tower in the midst thereof, and set up a wine-press therein; and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. And now, O ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and ye men of Juda, judge between me and my vineyard. What is there that I ought to do more to my vineyard that I have not done to it?" From all eternity my Heavenly Father foresaw my life. He

formed my soul to recognize Him the moment it saw Him, and to kindle into happy warmth as soon as it recognized Him. He prepared my place ; my Catholic parents, probably ; my watched and protected childhood ; He showed Himself to me from infancy in the visions that awake the Divine element in humanity ; in teachings, example, exhortation ; in religion ; in sacraments ; in the Holy Eucharist ; in calls and conversions. He led me through paths of sacred delight, that ever grew more fragrant and more delightful, to the supreme honour and endowment of the Priesthood. A thousand times in my life I have been conscious that His hand was under me and His force was guiding me. I have had no terrible trials of faith or loyalty, no temptation to give up God for the world, no devil's offer to give me all things if I would fall down and adore. My temptations have been manageable, and I have had the constant help of Grace, internal and external ; I have been over and over again brought back when I was straying ; and if there is one thing that I do feel, it is that God has care of me.

I know all this. And yet as I sit in thought before my God, I feel that I have not only sinned on occasions, but that the sinful temper is almost a part of my being. The temper of indifference to God ; of indifference whether I offend Him or not ; of what is self-idolatry ; of self-indulgence ; of moral weakness in doing what I know to be wrong ; in mean ambition ; in miserable egotism ; in hardness to others ; in neglect of duty ; in prayer negligently and coldly done.

O my God, was I made for this ? Was I made to

be no better than this ? I—this body-conditioned spirit that I call " myself "—that will never cease to be and to think—was I the subject of the stupendous act of creation, of my Creator's loving care and solicitude, in order to live in such a temper as this ; shy of my God, slinking in the obscure ways where God does not pass, attached to the noisome things that God does not bless, impatient of God, wearied of God, wanting to escape from God, not ashamed of any transaction that can avert the danger to come and yet save the sordid satisfaction of the moment ? O my Father and my only Friend ! Create in me a clean heart ! Renew a right spirit within me—an honest spirit, a straight spirit, an honourable spirit—a spirit that will look Thy love in the face, and correspond to Thy solicitude and my great destiny.

It will strengthen this temper of mind if we reflect upon the Degradation, the Outrage, and the Danger that accompany sin.

We have often considered that there is no beauty like the beauty of the soul in Grace ;—no beauty of flowers, no beauty of precious jewels, no beauty of the morning, of the noon, or of the evening, like the light of God's supernatural presence ;—no beauty of the hills or the forests, of the sea or of the firmament, like the spiritual radiance of the Seven gifts ; —no royalty of robe or coronet comparable to living Faith and Hope and queenly Charity. Yet there have been moments in our life when we have been in God's sight as loathsome, dreadful, dead things. " The crown has fallen from our head," cries the prophet in the name of Sion of old, " Woe to us

because we have sinned" (Lam. v, 16). Who can understand this woe? Physical death, earthly desolation, wreck, loss, darkness, horror—these things arrest the sense, contract the strings of the heart, wake up the fears of the spirit, call upon the tears of men. We have no nerves or senses that can be moved by the thought of mortal sin. Or rather, we have powers, we have a sensibility, partly of the flesh but mostly of the spirit—but we weep not, we fear not, we take little heed, because the things of the spirit are a region in which we live very little and very remissly. O my munificent Lord and Master! Thou didst intend me to be so good, so noble a work of Thy hands—to express Thyself in me so touchingly—to operate the likeness of Thyself in me so effectively—to set me so high in Thy Kingdom as a great work of Thy hands—to make me correspond so magnificently to the stupendous agency which Thou didst set in motion for my advantage! And behold, in my thoughtlessness, my self-absorption, my stupidity, my recklessness, I have slain my soul—made of my immortal spirit a handful of ashes, a fragment of rag, a bit of carrion, and nothing else. O let me now at least understand what Sin means, and turn with my whole heart to my God!

The Outrage of Sin is understood by remembering that God is the supreme King and Lord, Who holds us all in the hollow of His hand, and Who claims the right to our whole and undivided service. We must reflect that this sovereignty of God does not rest on mere force or strength. Before an earthly King, the human spirit may stand proudly inde-

pendent, even though physical constraint may be brought to bear upon him. With God and God's law no proud independence is possible: that is, it is irrational, disorderly, and in itself disastrous. Because God is Right and Reason and Justice. How this thought illuminates the mind and brings the poor human heart, as in a grip of steel, to the feet of God! For what is it that compels, and must compel, my homage, unless I wish to live as one of the brutes? It is that substantial Goodness, Justice and Truth, which I feel is participated by myself in similitude. That is God. Turn your back on Him and you spit upon your own self—all that within you makes you man. Lift a hand against Him and you break your own limbs, stab your own heart. And these are feeble images—for you might perhaps conceivably have a right to let yourself be wounded or killed; but you cannot have any right against your essential and inmost being—your central spiritual essence. At the same time, this Eternal Force which makes you what you are is not dead or blind, but is a Person, Who can enter into communion with you and you with Him; and His communion with you is the warmest and most solicitous love. So that the Outrage of Sin is double—the Outrage on supreme Majesty, and the Outrage on infinite Love. The Outrage on God's Majesty is in the very nature of human reason, and a result of all the light a man has. If a man is not sorry and contrite for it, he is a spoilt man, a warped intellect, a clouded mind, a degraded and defiled heart. The Outrage on Love need not be dwelt upon. It is more easily felt, perhaps. And God, in

His words to men, has not failed to utter remonstrance and complaint, rather as One who loves than as One who is supreme. The Prophet says: "All who forsake Thee shall be confounded" (Jer. xvii, 13). A terrible confusion, curse, wreck, necessarily awaits all who forsake the Eternal Power. "Thou hast forsaken God Who begot thee" (Deut. xxxii, 18)—forsaken Thy Father—was uttered in the beginnings of Israel. "They have forsaken Me" (Jer. ii, 13), said Jehovah of His favoured people in the day of Jeremias—left Me, the Creator, the Source, the Friend. It is time for us to feel this. It is time to understand what Sin does to God. For we Priests ought to be able to understand.

Then, there is the Danger—a consideration not to be lightly passed over. Hell-fire, as a motive of sorrow, may not be the noblest of motives, but it is a supernatural one, it does not necessarily exclude other motives, and it carries a man much further than the mere dread of punishment. The great truth that endless suffering is the doom of unrepented Mortal Sin acts naturally upon that instinct of self-preservation which is part of man's protective armour against danger. It acts, in this case, as a check on that self-assertion which is also instinctive, and very troublesome and dangerous, which shows itself in rebelliousness, and in the disposition to do as one pleases. But the deeper lesson of Hell-fire comes from the thought—If this be Sin's doom, how terrible must Sin be! For it is certain that Sin entails Hell-fire of its own nature, and not merely by the sentence of the Judge. Sin is, itself, a wrecking and a desolation which means Hell-fire as soon

as the period of probation is at an end. The sinner is not like the strong, healthy and happy man whom the satellites of a tyrant seize and carry off to a terrible doom. He is, on the contrary, a wretch in whose blood cancer has developed, and whose death and torture and corruption are as in evitable as natural law. Hell, therefore, although justly and rightly terrible, and, as such, useful to poor humanity, which depends so much, before its nobler powers will act, upon feeling and emotion, is far more sinister to the thoughtful mind as an indication that Mortal Sin sets up in one's being that condition which grows into Hell ; as a suggestion or reminder that Hell is not so much a dungeon of which the Almighty is the gaoler, as a living death to which you doom and deliver yourself. How every power within us ought to rally against such ruin ! How every noble instinct, every duty to oneself, every bond of communion with the Heavenly Father, Who made us for Himself and for His heaven, should come into play, within these hearts of ours, to make it impossible that so great a destiny should end in this ! In the past we have been reckless ; we have stifled the fear of the future. " Woe," says St. Augustine , " to the daring soul which hoped that if it forsook Thee it would obtain something better ! No. You may turn this way and that way, on your back, on your side, on your face—everything is hard and Thou alone art rest ! " (*Vae animæ audaci quae speravit si a Te recessisset se aliquid melius habituram. Versa et reversa, in tergum, et in latera, et in ventrem ; et dura sunt omnia, et Tu solus requies,* Confess. vi, 16.) Happy remorse—happy uneasi-

ness. We have felt too little of it. Yet, after all, have we ever been happy in sin ? In the book of Wisdom the sinners cry out : " Being born we have ceased to be . . . and we have been consumed in our own malignity " (Wisdom v, 13)—consumed, wrecked, destroyed ; even though the bolt had not fallen that marked the limit of mercy. With us His mercy still waits and expects. But let us never forget that it is His mercy that " we are not consumed " (Lam. iii, 72)—His mercy and not our right. O my Father, shall I abuse Thy mercy any longer ? Shall I not yield and throw myself at Thy feet !

These considerations on the gravity and the results of Sin should lead us to reflect on what have been the chief causes of our sins.

(1) First, there has been the want of a firm and serious purpose in life. Instead of definitely placing before our eyes the meaning and end of this mortal life and decisively ordering our thought and actions accordingly, we have drifted, like children, taking what gratification we could find. This has led to idleness ; perhaps to dissipation ; certainly to a habit of easy self-indulgence. We have perhaps settled down into the temper of rising no higher than the general run of the world.

(2) Another cause of grievous sin has perhaps been the flesh. In this matter, a most important step is to avoid occasions, and it is unpardonable for a priest to decline to make up his mind to this. Against thoughts which arise without any marked cause, a priest should carefully foster the habit of a prompt recourse to prayer.

(3) A great cause of sin is too great freedom of

speech; speech about superiors; speech about others, amounting to defamation or calumny; speech causing grievous scandal.

(4) Friendships and too intimate relations with persons of the other sex are a constant cause of sin. These should be made the subject of resolution and regulation.

(5) The neglect of mental prayer may have occasioned much forgetfulness of God; perhaps may have led to neglect of the Divine Office, and to indevout celebration of Mass.

(6) Our hastily made Confessions, some of which may have been very doubtful on account of inattention to sorrow, or, by our keeping back the real nature of a grievous fall.

When the Commandments were to be given on Sinai, God proclaimed "Let the priests who approach the Lord be sanctified, lest they be smitten" (*Sacerdotes qui accedunt ad Dominum sanctificentur ne percutiantur*. Exod. xix, 22). No pains during a Retreat should be spared by a Priest in order to rid himself of Mortal Sin, of the danger of perishing for ever, and of that sinful temper and indifference which makes a man's life without frequent sin morally impossible.

Points for Mental Prayer.

1. Consider your immortal soul. It is the creation of your Heavenly Father; it has a true and marvellous likeness to Him; He means it for Himself. He has endowed it with the natural powers of reason and will; and with sanctifying Grace, the Seven Gifts, and Faith, Hope and Charity. (1) I have

opposed and thwarted my God in the matter of my soul. He has exerted His might to lift it up and raise it; I have striven to cast it down and wreck it. (2) I have turned my back upon Himself, my only Friend, my Sovereign Lord. (3) I have spoilt and corrupted all that is noble and beautiful in my being. (4) I have placed myself in the danger of a miserable eternity. *Acts.* Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy, pardon me! According to Thy tender mercy take me back to Thy forgiving love! To Thee only have I sinned, for Thou art my all! Wash me from my sinfulness! Wash me yet more—yet more!

2. Look back upon your life: on the peevishness of your childhood—the callousness of your youth—the recklessness of your manhood; upon the self-indulgence which you kept up even under the robe of the levite; on your falls; on your personal hardness of heart; upon all your folly and ingratitude. (1) O my Lord and Master, I detest all the sinfulness of all my life! I would undo it as far as I could. (2) I would return to Thee, O my Father! Move me, enlighten me, draw me, compel me, to purge out this sinfulness, and to be Thy true child and beloved servant, as Thou didst mean me to be—as Thou dost now and always desire to make me.

3. What can I do to show my sincerity? I can avoid certain occasions. I can adopt certain means. I can strive never to commit any deliberate sin, however small. I can take measures against my evil habits. I can resolve to be regular in my spiritual duties. O House of Israel! turn to the Lord with all your heart! Prepare your hearts unto the Lord,

and serve Him only (1 Kings viii, 3). O my Lord and Saviour! Uphold Thy servant unto good! (*Suscipe servum Tuum in bonum*, Ps. cxviii, 122.) Thou hast said: "Return to Me, and I will receive thee" (Jerem. iii, 1). Make good Thy promise to Thy humble petitioner.

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V. THE INCARNATION

Now we approach the mysteries of Our Blessed Lord's Life. Our subject will be the Incarnation, that stupendous mystery of God made man. If we have made fresh aspirations after the love of God, if we have formed some kind of resolution to give our whole heart to God, we must approach the Rule, the Way, the Truth, the Life, the Book ; we must approach Jesus Christ, God made man.

We say then, with St. Augustine, "Here is my heart on which Thou hast had mercy when it was in its lowest depths" (*Ecce cor meum, Deus, ecce cor meum, quod miseratus es in imo abyssi!* Confess. ii, 4). Now the only way to learn how to give our heart to God is to study Our Lord. St. Augustine said : "I sought the way in vain until I embraced the Mediator between God and man, Christ Jesus. The Word was made Flesh, that Thy Wisdom might be milk to our infancy" (*Et quaerebam viam . . . nec inveniebam donec amplecterer Mediatorem Dei et hominum, Christum Jesum . . . quoniam Verbum caro factum est, ut infantiae nostrae lactesceret sapientia Tua*. Confess. vii, 18). He means that we could never obtain any useful knowledge of God without the Incarnation. It is hard to understand God. There was knowledge of God before, in the older days ; there were grand ideas of His nature and His dealings with mankind ; but had not God become man we should never really have known what God is—

His character. It is for the purpose of making God's character easy to comprehend that He was made man. Does He love me ? Does He care for me ? We should never have known that He loves us so intimately as He does, without this most remarkable, stupendous revelation of Himself. Endless books would not have taught us this word—the Solicitude of God. Look at the zeal, the ardour of the Saints ; their conversions, progress, union with God ; their discipline, prayer, personal devotion. It must be that they not only feared God, but had felt His friendship, knew His generosity and understood His solicitude. Where did they learn this ? In the Incarnation. I do not deny that in the Old Testament—the Psalms, for instance—God is represented as Father, Friend and Shepherd. But the multitude did not apprehend that these words tell of God's solicitude for the *individual human soul.* He was to them the *national* Father and Friend and Shepherd—and no more. Saints, Kings and Prophets may have known of His personal love, but the multitude was driven by fear. It was the Incarnation which first gave proof of Love—Love in the genuine sense of the word ; not figurative nor equivocal, but with all the qualities of Love, as we understand and make use of the word ; freed from human limitations and imperfections ; a personal friendship with each one of us. You may say you would, in any case, have known God was your Heavenly Father. I am not at all sure that you would. I have noticed that people are, in a way, very like those we read of in the Old Testament. They worship Almighty God. They fear Him and

the Judgement; they propose to obey His commands; they lead a life of honesty, duty and self-restraint; but they do not realize that God loves them. They do not realize that a definite, eager, almost reckless solicitude is a part of God's nature.

I am a unit. Nature cares for me not at all. The world, as I have said, is silent, cold, relentless. Your life-struggle does not affect it or make any difference—soon it will give you a grave and obliterate you. Nature is indifferent to you; its seasons went on and will go on and take no heed of you. The human stream is indifferent. As for our intimates, what can any one know of you or do for you? No one can enter into your struggles, depression, elation. The Incarnation shows that the great Force of all is my solicitous Friend—He who pierces all thought, to Whom the most secret thoughts are an open book, Who sees every motive, registers every aspiration, remembers every life-story; He who is Almighty, All-wise, Who requires no inducement or fee; Who is the Lord equally of Time and Eternity—of nature and of the after-world above and below.

The great demonstration of all this lies in the taking of our Human nature. Call it Humiliation, Annihilation, Condescension, Sacrifice—it is nothing of these, yet all of them. What it really is, is the proof of His saying that He came to "seek and save"—and that *God* seeks and saves; otherwise Christ would not have come as man, and said He longed to gather us into His bosom. Next, it proves the value of our souls: God must care for them; for Jesus Christ cares, and Jesus Christ is God. It

reveals the absolute value of a single human being. There is always danger of this idea being lost—that before God there is neither king nor slave, nor victor nor vanquished, nor superman nor underman, nor commander nor private, that He does not think of us or deal with us as nations, or races, or armies, or crowds, but as single individual souls. The Incarnation proves to us that God thinks nothing too much to do for our soul—our own souls—my soul, and that its home is Eternity. Then, it proves the reality and the nature of sin. It does this by the expiation of it by God Himself—an expiation not made anyhow, but by the most real and impressive suffering. God might have said "Let them be redeemed," and it would have been so. Or, He might have said nothing but have let Redemption and Reconciliation take place. Or, if He wished for the Incarnation, Our Lord might have remained only an instant in the world. One beat of the Sacred Heart would have been sufficient to redeem us; it would have paid for all to the utmost. Redemption, as we know it, is not merely a gift, a transaction. God purchased it for us by personal exertion. Now, if that does not throw light on the character of Our Heavenly Father, I do not know what could! He wished to redeem us by His own personal exertion. How could God exert Himself? Well, there is only one Person in Jesus Christ, and that Person is God, and no one can deny that Jesus Christ exerted Himself. He took the form of a servant, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the Cross. He did this to express His aversion from sin, to express His longing to abolish sin, to express His

anxiety that His children should never fall into sin. Thus, the Incarnation draws us to a personal Father and Friend, Who knows all our frame and history, is solicitous about our each step, prizes our immortal soul above the pearls of His throne, is prepared to enlighten, urge, support, carry, defend, and bring to triumph.

Without this familiar, loving friendship with God, we shall not go beyond the mere threshold of the Christian life. Unless we realise that God literally and essentially loves us we can never be really spiritual men. Numbers of good people never do realise it. The consequence is that they look upon the spiritual life as a formality, a tedious business, a burden. They never grow really humble or obedient or resigned; they are always fond of this life; have no aspiration after the vision of God, have no care about deliberate venial sin or habits of sin; find Mental Prayer a thankless task; treat the mystery of the Holy Eucharist as a rite or ceremony; and lead a worldly, merely natural, low-level sort of life, with no fruit for their souls.

But having tried to believe in the literal and essential love of God for the soul as revealed in Jesus Christ, we can see what the Incarnation means in the counsel of God. It is our Redemption and Sanctification by personal sacrifice, by personal example, and by personal operation.

(1) Personal sacrifice. Think of the career of Our Lord and the story of His life. It is a Person who is born, lives, suffers—a real person; One with a pedigree stretching into ancient history, with a Mother, a foster-father, a childhood and boyhood,

a ministry, words and acts, a tragedy. Hence one part of the secret of loving God is to stir up our beings in response to Bethlehem, to Nazareth, to Calvary. What must I do ? Meditate on it. Compassionate Him. Thank Him. Adore Him. Can I remain quiescent when my God does all this ? Do I not see that my salvation has involved the most stupendous work, activity, exertion, on the part of God, as if He could not do too much for me ? When I look at that supreme counsel — that mighty descent—that search for man—that contact with things infirm and earthly—that grasping every thread of man's nature—that strenuous experience of all that human life, human interest, human weakness—sin excepted—and human suffering meant, —must I expect to conquer by inertness, sluggishness and indifference ? Do I not see that my spiritual nature is called upon—my intelligence, my will, my feelings, my faith, my hope ? A man's life, more particularly a priest's life, must respond to the Incarnation—or else he drops out of the battle.

(2) Personal example. The " personal example of God ! " The Incarnation has made such a thing possible. We have not only an example of self-restraint, of straightness, lowliness, devotedness, and purity, but we have all these things with a certain abolition of limit—with excess, or rather, enthusiasm—which is the Christian mark. Virtue, to the philosopher, is a careful formation of the mind and heart, going neither too far, nor stopping short, aiming at its cool mean. To a Christian, virtue is just exactly the humility, the obedience, the obscurity, the suffering of Christ ; that is, these

things without limit. In practice and materially, there must be limits ; but there should be none in aspiration, or in fervour, because we can never even approach the virtue of Jesus Christ. The world may speak to us of proper pride, moderate self-restraint, one's right to personal independence and judgement. Christ has said : " Learn of Me because I am meek and humble of heart " ; and, again, " If any man come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his Cross."

(3) Personal operation. In the Incarnation, Christ brought us not only grace, in the strict sense, but His presence. St. Ambrose says He works upon us *quasi copiâ naturae suae*. We want virtues. We may get them by practice, self-restraint, obedience, kindness, and so on. But another way is to press close up to the Sacred Humanity of Our Blessed Lord, as the poor woman did, and pray that virtue may go out from Him to us. The one short cut to perfection is to draw near to Christ.

There are no words to express the Love of God : as St. Bernard said *Amat Immensitas ; amat Aeternitas ; amat Deus !* and we repay Him *cum mensura*. God gives without stint or measure : we give, in our small measure, grudgingly. Let us study Jesus Christ and learn to return without measure His measureless love.

Points for Meditation.

1. Go to Bethlehem in spirit. Jesus Christ is born into the world. This is God. This is the outcome of God's character. He is Infinite, Spirit, High, far above us, Mighty, yet He is a loving, anxious,

Father. He has come to show it, to prove it. Join with the Angels, with Mary and Joseph to adore Him. Thank Him for this "Word sent forth," this transcendant revelation of what He feels for us. St. Paul of the Cross cried "What! God made man! O burning charity! O passionate love!"

2. Remember how God used to come down into the Garden of Eden. He came often and talked with man. Once God came and said: "Adam, where art thou?" and Adam was forced to flee and to hide. It is something like that with us. We hide away, we keep away in our baseness. Yet He comes to us to restore us, to transform us and make us worthy of Himself. What shall we do? Offer Him our very infirmity. "O my Saviour, I have nothing to offer Thee but my weakness. I have nothing to offer Thee but my poor will that *will* go astray. I have nothing to offer but my mind and reason, feeble and dark; nothing but my hard heart. Take and transform all these things; change them and turn them into the likeness of Thee."

3. Ask pardon for having (1) neglected to meditate on the Incarnation; (2) neglected to imitate the Life of Jesus Christ; (3) neglected personal devotion to Our Divine Saviour. Ask pardon for trusting to your own efforts rather than to Him. Acts of regret. Resolution to try to understand better how to make use of this greatest of all His Works, the Incarnation.

VI. LIGHT ON LIFE

Let us ask ourselves this morning—when are we going to prepare for death? No doubt we have proposed to do so over and over again and have taken resolutions. I hope this retreat is not one of the graces thrown away, which, like terrifying ghosts of what might have been, will perhaps crowd round our deathbed.

We all stand in need of conversion. All require it, even the good and the holy. Most of us have been converted several times already, at this or that retreat, or at other times. Conversion begins in a sort of revelation (I use the word in a wide sense). A striking impression from Almighty God comes to us, which stirs us up and gives us new views, and there is a change in our whole life. It comes to us sometimes through sickness and trouble; we suffer acute pain, we have been very much disappointed by creatures in whom we trusted. Or, perhaps, it comes to us in some quiet hour when we lie awake at night. We are astonished to see how, though life goes on regularly, yet we have not half been living; portions of our nature were not used, never stirred up. The inmost consciousness, with most of us, is unaffected—like some feudal castle, in mediæval times, on whose battlements men-at-arms walk to and fro, watching, and from whose open portals knights and archers sally forth for the fight, but within whose inner walls are dungeons,

dark chambers never used, and, perhaps, a day comes when they are forgotten, though they will last longer than the castle itself. The dark chambers of the human heart are the centre of the heart's life —its spiritual and immortal life—which, in too many men, languishes and lies torpid, neglected and half-forgotten.

The rare occasions when the inner consciousness is lighted up are very precious. Then ensues what we call conversion. Whenever it comes, it consists of a vision or spiritual experience that we have never had before. Sometimes it is a vision of God—some aspect of God: some spiritual apparition; some vivid light upon His fatherhood, His presence, His purity, His Infinity, His all-sufficing and everlasting being. Then, as when Daniel, on the banks of the Tigris, encountered the Angel, the soul falls flat upon the earth in fear and consternation; and then raises itself, as Daniel rose to his knees and his hands, to listen for a voice and for guidance. Sometimes it is a vision of one's self—one's loneliness, one's inefficiency, one's need of a friend, one's hastening death, one's immortal soul.

These lights come from God. We cannot command them at will. But we can humbly take such means as piety and Catholic feeling suggest, for obtaining them. And when they come, we wonder we never saw things in this way before. "Knowest thou the great paths of the clouds? . . . . Knowest thou the order of the Heavens?" (Job xxxvii, 16, and xxxviii, 32). There are heights and distances in the spiritual life—horizons, seas, mountains—of which we have no conception. They are

out of sight. We have little idea what lies above or below or beyond the horizon we see. There are plenty of secrets that would not be secrets to us if we were attentive to Grace. O my Lord, what must I do to be saved ? I do not know. Am I wasting my life ? What would be my fate if I were to die to-night ?

Life is a strange thing, so unstable, so rapidly passing. You may be at the beginning of it, or in its maturity, or on the slope, or very near the end. We are changing every day, drawing nearer to the last throb, the last movement, the last moment, the last breath. Your bones may be soft, now ; they are hardening every sunrise, will grow hard, become brittle, and then you will leave them to the friendly earth. Your muscles may be strong now ; they will grow weaker and weaker, and your hard-worked heart will slow down, and stop. You who walk the earth and survey it, and go in and out, and meet men—you will come, either suddenly or gradually, to lie flat on your back, your limbs stiff and your eyelids drawn down over those active eyes, like a house that is shut up. And where will your soul be ? Where that which is your self will be, with all those live and craving powers that make up the real ' You.'

This forces man to think " What is the wisest life ? "

Holy Scripture has two ways—and only two—of describing human life. On the one hand, it is to " walk before God, the way of the Lord "—God first, and last, and all through. It is the path over which the Holy Spirit broods, from which evil

things are banished, the way of life, and of peace, of truth, of wisdom. In Isaias we read of "a path and a way that shall be called the holy way" (xxxv, 8), the way that it is the unceasing prayer of the Saints to be led into and guarded therein. On the other hand, "There is a way . . . and the end thereof leadeth to death" (Prov. xiv, 12)—a way that is darkness, where the feet slip (*Tenebrae et lubricum.* Ps. xxxiv, 6); a way of iniquity; a "stumbling"; a way that is "paved with smooth stones and the end thereof is hell, darkness and woe" (*via peccantium complanata lapidibus et in fine illorum inferi, et tenebrae et poenae.* Eccles, xxi, 11). "Let us search into our ways, let us seek, and let us return to the Lord" (*Scrutemus vias nostras, et quaeramus, et revertamur ad Dominum.* Thren. iii, 40).

For throw your imagination a few years onward. Will it be years? Suppose you have had a prosperous and happy life. I am not speaking of a sinful life: only of one not very careful of sin. You arrive at a good old age—say 80, or more. You are a priest or religious. But you have had your own way a good deal—perhaps, by making yourself disagreeable to others. You have managed to escape a good deal of observance. You have had the handling of money. You have stayed a good deal away from your mission or monastery. You have had charges, important charges, high, it may be. You have succeeded fairly well, made some reputation, and you have taken freely all the ease, enjoyment and freedom you could get. You have been vain, grasping, self-indulgent, disagreeable, supercilious, a bitter critic

of superiors, a murmurer, without a great love of obedience, or, indeed, of any obligations or vows. Yet your life, in spite of your solicitude for yourself, has not been what men would call a pleasant or agreeable one; there has been a good deal of struggle and a good deal of dirt. There has been envy—you have had enemies—and, above all, a lurking uneasiness, stings of conscience, remorse. Then comes the ante-chamber of death—old age—when a man feels his props and his stays fall away—his friends, his flatterers, his bodily activity, his sight and his hearing. The desolation gradually deepens till the curtains draw round and it is death. Shall we find, in that hour, that we have neglected our best, our only Friend? Let us think on this whilst there is time. "If a man live *many years* and have *rejoiced* in them all, he must remember the *darksome time*, and the *many days* which, when they shall come, the *things past* shall be accused of vanity" (Eccl. xi, 8). All is over, all vain, all empty, all vanished; desolation and isolation enfold us. To whom shall we turn? Well may Holy Scripture cry out: "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth, before the time of affliction come, and the years draw nigh of which thou shalt say 'they please me not'—before the light is darkened." (Eccles. xii, 1, 2).

So death throws light upon life. What must my life be?

(1) There must be no half-measures. There must be a way, a rule for us, which we must think of very seriously. I am not speaking of our external but of our internal life—the principles that are to guide

us in our relations to Eternity. They are simple, but it may be difficult to bring our souls to the point and take them up whole-heartedly. We have to take up the Hidden Life of our Blessed Lord and Saviour —the only wise life—and learn from Him how to live. Our Blessed Lord passed a long time in silence, in solitude, in inactivity. Out of His whole life of thirty-three years, if you take away His Infancy, His Childhood, the Days of Nazareth, you only leave three years of Public Life. His whole life then was practically a Hidden Life. Was it thrown away ? We can never say that. Look into this Blessed Life carefully. It was, if I may so speak, a well thought-out scheme for instructing souls to the end of time. " What," says St. Bernard, " would have been the use of the Cross if our heart remained proud ? " The Hidden Life is the rule for our lives.

(2) We must seek to live an Interior Life, and, as a preparation, avoid sin as the plague. We begin the Interior Life by the practice of Virtues, Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance—all the Pagan writers class them much in the same way. But these virtues are different now that the light of His life has shone on them. The Pagans thought of virtue as something in moderation, no excess, not too much on either side. You must be good to your neighbour, yet not so as to forget yourself, and so on. Our Blessed Lord gave fresh conceptions to these virtues—different rules and meanings.

(3) We must seek to live a Supernatural Life. We do this by Faith, Hope and Charity. The heathens knew nothing at all of these. Our Blessed Lord sent up a continual holocaust to His Heavenly

Father. He had Faith, not as we have it, for He was *comprehensor*, not *viator* only, as we are. The flame of His holocaust went up every moment. His heart burned with love and the zeal of God. This was quite a new idea in the world. We must take up that—live a life of Faith, Hope, Love.

(4) We must learn from Him the lesson, entirely unknown to Pagans, of self-abnegation. They did brave and noble things, but they had no conception of humility, poverty, obscurity, and suffering as being good in themselves. Only the best of them, such as Plato, seem to have had some dim idea of this. And we must practice prayer and ask for God's Grace, most precious of all things.

(5) Finally, we must make preparation for death. Let us sweep our eyes in one comprehensive glance over our life as a whole. For the moment, let me ignore death, and realise that the personal, conscious life, which is my existence, originating in a past moment which is dark to me, will now go on through the years of time, and, when time ceases, will still go on, measured I know not how, but conscious and personal still, for all eternity. Over this life of mine I have no control, beyond desiring, hoping, snatching at the persons and things that float past me. Therefore, what joy, what consolation, to know that there is an Almighty force which holds not me alone but all created things in the hollow of His hand—a Father and Friend, Who cares for my poor personal life as if there were nothing else for Him to care about. From Him I originated. By Him I am called and carried on—in the Old Testament phrase—as a mother carrieth

her child on her bosom. To Him death is no end, no closed door, no cessation, for He rules the spaces beyond just as absolutely. Therefore my deepest wisdom is to turn to Him with all my heart and being; with Him, and with Him alone, I am safe. But more than that. With Him I am right; for He is the end and completion of my being—as the ship, with its curves and stem and rudder, which on land lies helpless, no sooner breasts the sea than it rides erect and easy in its proper element. The true preparation for death is to prepare for the everlasting life, and to learn on earth to love Him with Whom we desire and hope to dwell in the Eternity that awaits us after death.

Points of Mental Prayer.

1. My life is slipping away. A great part of it is lost. How? It has been a life of laxity, of self, of human motives—a merely natural life. There has been little real enlightenment, little steadfast love of spiritual things, little practice of virtue. If I were to die to-night, how I should regret and fear! Therefore turn to God with your regret. Think how your days slip by like a shadow. But there is time yet; you have will and power left you. Thank God for that. *Vitam meam annuntiavi tibi* (Ps. lv, 9). I will lay my life at Thy feet, ask Thee to let me take a grip of it and make it not merely *safe* for myself (that is a secondary motive), but worthy of Thee, O my Heavenly Father, in whom is all my trust.

2. Picture to yourself the hour of your death. You are in sickness, solitude, abandonment, desolation. Your life, now so active, has turned to ashes.

"Shall I deserve to find Thee in death, my only Friend, my Heavenly Father, close beside me? Will there be any black fears to make me shudder?"

3. Resolve to lead a life that is really supernatural, putting God first—a life of humility, mortification, prayer. Consider all creatures as means, merely means, to draw us nearer to God. Dwell on one or other of these thoughts so as to prepare yourself with great zeal to enter into what is meant by the interior life.

Acts (1). O my God, I praise Thee and rejoice in Thee! I confess Thee as the Sovereign Lord of all. I kiss the hem of Thy garment as my Heavenly Father! I would cry out continually with the Cherubim and the Seraphim, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts, full are the Heavens and the earth of Thy glory." To Thee have I lifted up mine eyes, Who dwellest in the Heavens. I will love Thee, O God, my strength, my firm foundation, my refuge, my deliverer. To Thee I dedicate my life; for my life is from Thee and with Thee; and let it never be separated from Thee.

(2) O my God, I cannot do without Thee, and it is Thou Who hast made me so! To Thee my soul ever turns, unless it is fettered and degraded. Be merciful, O my Heavenly Father, and stoop down to my nothingness. Purify more and more my heart that it may cling to Thee, and Thee alone. Without Thee, I must ever remain in my need and misery. I offer Thee my intelligence to be illumined in Thy light. I offer Thee my will to be inspired and ruled by Thy most holy will. I offer Thee my memory and imagination; purify and chasten them, O my

Master ! I offer Thee my senses and my whole body, that I may wholly serve Thee, and never degrade that which Thou hast made. Accept my life. And when death comes, carry my life over that dark passage into Thy full light.

VII. THE HIDDEN LIFE

We are now, by the help of Almighty God, to continue the study, begun in the last discourse, of what the interior spiritual life is, according to the teaching of Our Blessed Lord. There are certain aspects of the Life of Jesus Christ which have a great effect upon the hearts of religious men. His example on earth is the only way to learn. There is no other. Unless we imitate Him, we somehow go astray.

Remember, what we have already considered, the *solicitude* of the Incarnation: how it demonstrates God occupied, anxious, affectionate. Hence we cannot doubt that His human life was a deliberately planned document, set down as a model, for our instruction.

A few days ago I read in a weekly paper, with a high reputation from a literary point of view, that the monastic virtues, Obedience, Poverty and Chastity, in the present state of the world were *dead virtues*, not considered as virtues at all. This is exactly what the world *does* hold. But if we wish to follow Our Blessed Lord, we must be in opposition to what the world teaches. The form worldliness takes in any given generation is apt to penetrate to the cloister. It will affect the ideas of the clergy and religious. That is the danger. After all, you come from the world. You have not abandoned all relations with it. The air of the world affects you

before you know what you are doing. Study, then, Our Blessed Lord's example.

We have no numerous details of Our Lord's life, not even of the Passion, and not at all of the 30 years at Nazareth. But the broad outlines are like a mountain range that sees all the history of a country pass and remains itself unchanged. And, first, we see the excess of His life, the absoluteness of the "virtues," as we call them—or, rather, the absence of limits in the spiritual life. As we have already remarked, a virtue, in the Pagan view, never went as far as it could. The moral virtues, as the old Philosophers knew them, were always a mean between two extremes. Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance, Kindness, Humility, Simplicity, Purity—these were reckoned as virtues with them as with us, but always with a reserve. In the practice of virtue, they taught, I must take care not to hurt or damage myself—my soul, my spirit, my body. As for the virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity, they were unknown to them.

What is our rule for estimating what is too much or too little in the practice of virtue? Our Lord shifted and removed the limits from virtue. Of course, the Cardinal virtues are themselves a *mean* between extremes. Prudence bids us do neither too much nor too little, not to go too far one way or the other; Fortitude forbids us, on the one hand to be cowardly and, on the other, to be rash; Temperance keeps us midway between excess and starvation; Justice holds the scales evenly balanced, between right-doing and wrong-doing. But even these virtues have been affected by Our Lord's life.

New horizons have been opened and the rules altered; He has introduced in the reckoning the spiritual and eternal.

There are, for example, two sorts of Prudence: human prudence and Christian prudence. (I am giving you the teaching of St. Vincent of Paul.) Human prudence has for its end our temporal prosperity, and is guided by mere natural considerations. Christian prudence takes the Incarnate Widsom of God as its guide; its thoughts, words, works are regulated by the maxims of Faith and the Gospel. It judges as Christ judges. He exemplified it in His whole life, by retirement, simplicity, interest in souls, always acting for eternity. So with the other Cardinal virtues. Justice is doing what is right between man and man. We know better by Our Lord's principles what that really implies. Fortitude used to lead to Stoicism; men did things simply because they were difficult. Christian fortitude is no such thing, but a supernatural determination to be faithful in what is arduous—to be loyal to Christ. Temperance is supernatural Christian restraint and mortification, not merely for our health, for a good example, or for right reason. We must have a supernatural end in all of them.

I need say nothing of the removal of all limits from the Theological virtues. They can have none. Faith cannot be too firm; Hope is not a mere negation between despair and presumption, but a vital aspiration; and charity is to love God with all our hearts and minds and strength. But it is the personal virtues that Our Lord's example affected the most: I mean, the interior dispositions, com-

bined with external demonstration, which most express that *self* of which we are conscious, viz., the conceit of ourselves, the attention to our own commodity, and sacrifice for others. It is in this respect the world has remained Pagan.

What Our Lord wished to exhibit by His example was virtue without any reservation, that is—complete devotion, complete abnegation, complete humiliation.

1. As we have said, it was the very essence of Our Blessed Lord's interior life, that, like a holocaustal flame, His whole being burned with worship and love of His Heavenly Father. It was the holocaust of His Sacred Heart that redeemed the world; the complete devotion of that heart, intensified by suffering; a holocaust, in one sense, complete the first instant, but continued through all the moments of His life, burning more fiercely in His Passion, and consummated in His most painful and freely-accepted death. It is this that has inspired the hearts of the Saints. "The charity of Christ constraineth us," says St. Paul (2 Cor. v, 14). St. Francis de Sales says: "To know that Jesus Christ has died on the Cross, for the love of us, is enough to constrain our hearts with a violence of love as strong as it is admirable." My Saviour has given Himself entirely for me, and I will give myself entirely to Him!

2. But the Hidden Life of Our Lord is most remarkable in its example of complete abnegation and complete humiliation—what I have called the *personal* virtues. There are three great personal, natural impulses: *Pride* (vanity, self-sufficiency),

Possession, and *Selfishness* (against others). With the heathen, it was always a question how much pride or vanity is commendable—we still speak of a "proper pride"; how much holding, short of avarice, is praiseworthy; how much of our own we should yield to our neighbour, or part with for his benefit. Now the most marked thing in Our Blessed Lord's life is His excess of self-abnegation. Our Lord's teaching as seen in it was: First, to be utterly obedient, with an internal Humility which affected the very inmost essence of the reason and will; secondly, to possess absolutely or practically nothing; thirdly, to be ready to do everything for the neighbour, even to the laying down of life. In other words, Our Lord's Hidden Life was grounded upon Obedience, Solicitude, Poverty, Suffering; and this, not for His own sake, but for the sake of those whom He came to redeem.

It would have seemed, to human eyes, that it was just these virtues that Jesus Christ ought to have exercised with moderation. He seemed, in order to redeem the world, to require money, armies, preachers, glory, and influence. By His example, He has shown that there is a more effective way to success. And also that the principal thing in conversion is to convert the heart, which you do best by your own ascetic life.

3. But there is a deeper lesson even than these. We learn that Humility is a good thing, a best thing in itself; that it is better to be obedient than not; that it is better to be poor than not to be poor; to be unknown than to be known or fêted; to suffer than not to suffer. In other words, we learn that

these things draw us nearer to God, and the more near in proportion as we possess them. Do we think so, or do we not ? I say this, and it is a most serious thing to say, we are not persuaded that these things are the best to aim at. Yet this is the lesson for men, and religious, drawn from the interior life of Jesus Christ—the lesson of obedience, poverty and suffering, best in themselves, best without limit ; the more of them the better. I must not, however, exaggerate. There are limits, even to these virtues ; limits, that is, to their external manifestation ; as when a superior must rather command than obey, or when we take measures to secure and hold the necessaries of life, or when we refuse to encourage by our alms an undeserving man. But these do not, and should not, interfere, practically, with the interior spirit which utterly repudiates self, vanity, egoism, possession, and sensual contentment.

Hence the spirit of the Saints has shown itself chiefly in these matters of the Hidden Life. The Saints have been equalled, perhaps, in the external manifestation of Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance. But they are alone, not only in believing and loving God, but in this personal imitation of and likeness to Christ. One hears people say " How good Protestants are ! much better than many Catholics." But it is not so at all. They have wrong motives and reasons generally—or, at least, imperfect ones. I remember, a short time ago, a book of some twenty or thirty essays was sent to me on " Moral Training of Boys." There was not a word of the supernatural all through, and yet they spoke of " moral training ! " It was pagan training

—better than nothing, I suppose (the pagans at their best were not to be despised)—but yet a poor thing compared with morality as transfigured and lifted up by the Gospel. Remember, if you have to teach morality, you must teach Christian morality, not natural morality.

It is, indeed, the effort of the world to prevent this particular lesson from being carried out by Christians. Even priests and religious do not—I will not say practise like Our Lord, for that is not required of us—but accept the holy theory that the more of Humility, Self-abnegation and Humiliation the better. Hence so many of us simply spend our lives in shirking or minimising obedience, obscurity, and suffering. Hence we so seldom welcome them—seldom put our hearts in unison with them when forced upon us, saying this is the best, this is what I really want, this is as it should be.

In every Retreat we should betake ourselves to Nazareth to renew our interior spirit. We should, first of all, take the Hidden Life in, in all its significance. It is a deliberate attempt on the part of Jesus Christ to model the Christian life. Christ was not an eccentric, or fanatic, but a leader, a director, a father, a sympathiser with all human souls, whom He knew by having a soul and being a man Himself. He left external limits to a certain extent at our discretion. But there is the "norm"—Never depreciate obedience, suffering, observance; never contemn, or hinder ascetic views; never be content with yourself until you have brought yourself, with some kind of conviction, up to the ideal of Nazareth.

Many young priests do not dwell sufficiently on

the obligation there is to imitate the Hidden Life. They like to look forward to a free life, to having time of their own, to being their own masters, to a fine healthy enjoyment of life, to holidays of a more or less expensive kind, to the handling of money, the comforts of home, and pleasant daily recreations in their favourite ways. To think of such men as devout lovers of Jesus has something grotesque in it. We must not allow this spirit to take hold of our life. Much may be excused to health and good spirits, but not the deliberate or continued rejection of the spirit of our Master. Freedom and pleasure are only admirable as means to an end, as concessions to a weak and pusillanimous heart. We are not to be scrupulous, but, frequently, in prayer and meditation, to revert to our ideals.

And when we meditate, we must remember that there is a comparatively short and easy way of impressing our poor weak nature with the teachings of Nazareth. It is to cling in wistfulness and affection to our model. It is to touch Him, so to say, in order that virtue may go out from Him and penetrate our own beings. It is to hold ourselves beneath the spray of the fountain of whose fullness we all receive. It is to press beneath the shadow of His mighty Humility and to desire that it may possess our own heart. It is to watch close at hand the flashing wheel of His obedience, and to feel a sympathetic movement in our own beings. It is to stand in the way of the hot outflowing lava-stream of His love of men, and to get that fire into our bowels. This is truly profitable prayer.

Points of Mental Prayer.

1. Go to the Holy House of Nazareth. It is the school of Jesus Christ, for the whole world and for all time. Mary and Joseph are the first Disciples. Then come all who bear the name of Christian. There are no books—though loving hands will afterwards write down some of the secrets of that retreat. There is a silent, divine Heart, living with Poverty, Obscurity, Obedience and Suffering.

Thank your God for this wonderful revelation. How could earthly reason or wisdom have ever guessed this lesson? See in Nazareth what your Heavenly Father will do for you. "Bind it upon thy fingers, write it upon the table of thy heart" (Prov. vii, 3). "O ye men, to you I call, and my voice is to the children of men" (Prov. viii, 4).

2. The only true perfection of human nature, the only real dignity of soul, the only way to find happiness is to learn the lesson of Nazareth. My heart is a noble creation of God, that has to live through the years of probation. Its impulses are high, but they have to contend against pride, vanity, sensuality and selfishness. Half-measures are of little use. It is of little use to say to Pride, to Vanity, to Sensuality: "Thus far and no further." My Jesus, living with Thee in spirit at Nazareth, I adopt Thy Obedience, Thy Suffering, Thy Lowliness. I hereby choose them. But do Thou and Thy blessed Mother help my holy aspirations!

3. There is a phrase of St. Augustine's that may help us. "All the ways of Christ, according to the flesh, are spontaneous poverty, *the worst of every-*

thing heaped up (*cumulata vilitas*), suffering taken spontaneously and given by others." That is what we have got to choose and prefer as much as we can. We cannot go to the extremes to which Our Blessed Lord and the Saints have gone, but at least we can never say a word against the ascetic view of the interior life, against austerity—asking "What is the use of it?" . . . etc. Let us say, rather, "This is what we ought to aim at. This is the spirit of Christ."

Hitherto, O, my God, I have been thoughtless, worldly, weak, wrong. I have lived an unspiritual life, trifling with my vanity, egoism, sensuality, selfishness. These I now renounce. O my Jesus, create a new spirit within me.

VIII. THE SACRED PASSION

Our Lord chose a life of suffering. It is a profound mystery that He should have done so; the Angels themselves will not be able to understand it. It is a tremendous enough fact that He took a human form and became man, but that He should choose to suffer! If He had come down to earth and placed Himself apart in a magnificent city, surrounded with pomp and power, and inaccessible to ordinary persons, who were merely to be allowed to know of His presence, it would have been far more than we deserved, or than we should have supposed possible. But to come as He has done, and to suffer the whole time! We shall never understand it.

He chose, as we have said, Obscurity, Poverty, Labour, Obedience. All this was suffering of a sort. It was painful to His human nature, and He was especially sensitive. He suffered all His life, but especially in the Passion. Then His pain was more excessive than we can conceive. Calvary was begun with the Conception. The indications in Holy Scripture are sufficient to tell us that He foresaw His Passion from the first moment of His life. He did not suffer its pain, but He anticipated it; and to persons of a sensitive nature anticipated sufferings are as bad as the sufferings themselves. Try to penetrate the mystery. Reflect on it; and as far as we can see, you will find the purpose of suffering was to intensify the acts of the Sacred Heart. We

are not to suppose Almighty God loves to see one suffer. It would be blasphemous to suppose that He gloats over a being in pain. It is true that He is glad to see sin expiated. But suffering does not expiate. A dog cannot expiate, when it suffers, because it has no soul to accept suffering. Suffering expiates only when a person accepts it. It then becomes an intense act of love. But if we do not accept it, it hardens us the more. The Sacred Heart could not find suffering in Heaven, so He came on earth to seek it. It was a constant homage to the Eternal Father, a complete acceptance of His will. It intensified His acts—gave them a peculiar intensity that they would not otherwise have had, though they were always Infinite in effect.

There are many other reasons why we ourselves should accept suffering. After all, our life is suffering. From this point of view it is fitting that He should teach us how to suffer.

First, He taught us that it is a good thing to suffer. The more we suffer, the more intense our acts may be. Sometimes suffering makes people worse. We see that in the world. If we punish children we may make them harder, unless we take care. Suffering is a terribly powerful agent one way or the other. He chose to suffer to instruct and encourage us. We have so much suffering that a Christian must have a philosophy of suffering in order to know how to take it, to understand its advantage. Our Lord's example is better than all books. The Cross is our book. This is how to suffer. It is an obvious lesson, a short and simple book.

We see that He chooses and accepts suffering;

hence it must be good for us. Then we make up our minds to use it, to accept it. Then we learn to go on, to persevere with it all through our lives. We increase more and more our faith in its spiritual value. Then a feeling of loyalty comes to us. If *He* did this, what about *us*? If He suffered this, we must not be behindhand—especially as He bids us "Take up my Cross." This, then, is one great reason of His suffering—to teach and encourage us; to show us how to use the suffering of which life is full to most of us; to inspire faith in its spiritual value and a loyal desire to imitate our loving Saviour.

Next, suffering softens the heart of man. We must love with our whole heart, that is, of course, with intelligence and reason; but a great deal depends on feeling. The sight of the Cross softens us. Our heart turns more easily to God, loves Him more intensely. A great many people feel for the sufferings of Christ. It is a great grace. But even if we cannot feel them sensibly, we can say "How He must have suffered—and for me!" We make acts of loving gratitude to Jesus. We take a deeper interest in Him and feel a warmer attachment to Him.

Next, He wishes to express the heinousness of sin. We read the book of our sins in His sufferings. How, then, did He suffer and in what way?

He suffered extreme and gross physical pain, the most extreme that can be conceived, pain in bodily form, every kind of painful outrage. He suffered extremely and undeservedly. He suffered from persons He was trying to benefit. He suffered from

the good—some were in good faith—and from the wicked. He suffered by hunger, by thirst, by poverty.

Then His mental sufferings. He suffered intensely from *fear*. The fear and anticipation of pain, no doubt, caused the Sweat of Blood. "May this Chalice pass from Me." This was the terror of apprehension in His lower nature. "He began to fear and to be heavy." There is terrible suffering to a sensitive soul in *fear*.

Then, He suffered from *failure*. That is an intense suffering to minds with great and noble ideas. He failed in His life. Of course, He chose to fail. The triumphs were to come after death, but He suffered in His human nature from failure and disappointment. He suffered from contempt, from loneliness and solitude—none to care for Him. His Blessed Mother, indeed, cared, but she suffered, too, as He did; they did not console each other. He suffered, finally, from the Cross. The Cross brought sufferings and humiliations of its own. He bore the punishment of death. That, and that alone, if He had borne nothing else, would have been a terrible suffering to Him.

Let me reflect that Our Lord suffered for me. The Passion was not merely a scheme to redeem the human race: but, in virtue of His Supreme Knowledge, which embraces all things, and His never failing Love, it was an expiation for my sins, a lesson to my spirit, a call to my heart, a generous outpouring to attract my love. My sins weighed on the Sacred Heart; they were a shadow over His whole life—even as an infant child; they bound His hands, bruised and cut His flesh, pierced His brow,

nailed Him to the Cross, drew the last cry from His breast. He thought of me and said: Surely he will realise what sin is when he reads about Me; surely he will repent, will never sin again. For Our Lord's Passion should affect our heart in two ways: first, it should make us feel what sin really is; and, next, it should draw us with tenderness to Jesus as we think how fully He has paid our expiation, and how we may rest in happy peace—the moment we have really repented—in the thought that we have no impossible penance to do, but only to give Him our whole heart, and to accept the light and momentary chastenings that life may bring. Then, no doubt, our hearts will want to suffer more and more in order to draw nearer to Him. If He has done so much for me, how can I be ungenerous? And it is not so much *what* He has done; it is not the ransom, the pain endured, the blood poured out; but the solicitous, loving, generous Heart, the personal love for me which all this shows. "I have loved thee and delivered Myself for thee." How shall I understand the length and breadth, the height and depth, of this love? He could have saved me by a word, an act of volition. But He wished to be for all time the Sufferer, the Wounded One, the Man of Sorrows, that He might more largely and loudly express the affection of His inmost breast.

Therefore, let me look on Jesus—look with the intense and unabating gaze of one who looks on his Salvation. His Sacred Passion heals and transforms my life.

Look upon Him in His agony in Gethsemane, in His dereliction. Learn to accept mental trouble,

the fear, the anxiety, the doubt, the mental pangs of your life and your work.

Look upon Him, betrayed, bound, and dragged into Jerusalem. Learn to suffer treachery and disgrace, if it comes your way; to suffer false accusation, derision—to be a fool for Christ's sake.

Look upon Him cruelly scourged—and long to lead a life of real mortification and asceticism.

Look at Him crowned with thorns—and offer thy head, thy brow, thy face, thine eyes, thy brain, that thou dost set such store by. Learn to be modest and humble, to accept all that makes the self in you smart.

Look upon Him carrying His Cross. Fasten thy gaze upon this, the type of all immolation, the great lesson of life. Awaken thine heart to recognize this, if thou hast not recognized it before.

Look upon Him nailed to the Cross—and learn, not only to suffer even to extremity, but to understand that crucifixion is Christ's attitude to the world, His greeting to it, His defiance of it—that He refuses either to enjoy it, or to covet it, or to be degraded by it—as thou also must refuse.

Points for Consideration.

1. *Our Own Sufferings.* We have got to live our lives. We must learn to accept the inevitable sufferings and the ordinary mortifications of life; we must learn self-restraint, even in small matters; renunciation of many pleasures—for example, of certain recreations, of certain reading, of glory—this latter always, unfailingly, on principle. We have to accept frustrated desires—call them ambition;

we want this or that or the other, some office or dignity, perhaps; accept the frustration of the desire. It is part of your Cross. We have to accept the suffering implied in avoidance of sin—sometimes. We must practise the hard side of life—be hard on ourselves, foresee where we are likely to be soft, and guard against it. All this means pain, inconvenience, tedium, a certain slavery of the flesh, for we keep it in bonds. You may say, "Oh! I will do all this as it comes. I need not go to meet it. I am not obliged." That is not the temper of a religious man. You must willingly shoulder this Cross of the ordinary inconveniences of life, mental and physical, whatever they may be. We must look on it as the normal thing—this acceptance of ordinary sufferings. Any other temper would be unsafe. As to bodily pain, perhaps our practice through life has been to dread it, to shirk it, to scheme to avoid it as far as possible. When it comes, it makes us ill-tempered and sour, defiant and restless. Our Blessed Lord looked on pain as a holy baptism wherewith He desired to be baptised for the perfection of His spiritual work. We must use pain like that; be resigned, accept it, let it soften our heart and turn it to Almighty God. I know it is hard in extreme pain, but one learns by degrees, and, after all, if one has been impatient and forgetful, one can always turn back and be sorry. Some of us have serious mental trouble, perhaps mortified vanity, hurt feelings, fear. Some suffer much from fear. The Agony in the Garden is intended to instruct and comfort us in mental suffering.

2. *Voluntary Suffering.* Some may want to take

voluntary sufferings on themselves. Austerity, voluntary austerity is a holy thing. I will not say a word against it. The Saints have done such things, inflicted bodily suffering on themselves; many holy religious do so. But for most of us, I think, it is best to accept what we have to undergo. Anything further should be subject to advice from directors. If austerity were to lead us not to make efforts to accept the ordinary sufferings of life, it might be harmful. We need careful advice in this matter. We must chiefly learn from the Cross to be on the mortified side of life, to love it, to say "That is the life for me." Human nature wants to take the best out of life and shirks pain. Even those who cheerfully accept troubles as they come are apt to say, "It is an excellent thing that there are not any more; I have quite enough." To thirst for more, that is the temper of the Cross. We should be quite convinced that the hard side of life is *the* life. We must bring ourselves up to want it, to desire it. If we find ourselves weak, there is no necessity to force ourselves too much; but we must carefully abstain from the temper which urges us to *shirk* the Cross.

IX. PRAYER

THERE is nothing so easy as prayer, and, at the same time, nothing so difficult. We are all able to pray, that is, we have the elements of prayer just as we all have the elements of organ-playing; but as a skilled art it is difficult indeed. Must we then be skilled in prayer? Yes, we must; for, with our spirit, it is either Prayer, or the Devil, the World and the Flesh. Either our spirit must acquire a certain recollection and habit of asking and of worship, or our life will be worldly and dissipated. St. John Climacus says: "Prayer is the familiar conversation and union of man with God" (*Oratio est familiaris conversatio et conjunctio hominis coram Deo*). There is the philosophy of prayer in this definition. Conversation and Union. Conversation implies communication, words on both sides; you speak to God and God speaks to you. That is the way you and your Heavenly Father come together. That is what prayer is. Unless there is this sort of communion, God is out of our soul. Unless there is a habit of it, God is habitually out of the soul. If we are in earnest, it is true wisdom to sacrifice anything or everything for more intimate and continuous Prayer. Our sins, our virtues, our work, the life to come, Death—all these things depend on Prayer.

The great thing is to have prayer drawn out over our whole lives, as it were. This is the object of the

Canonical Hours and, generally, of all regular prayer. The idea in the mind of holy men and of the Church is that the whole day should be prayer. In the desert, and in our Holy Father St. Benedict's time, there was no half-hour's, or hour's meditation. The whole life of the monk was to be prayer. The Divine Office was vocal prayer; all the rest was contemplation, gazing on God. When Our Holy Father says prayer is to be *brevis et pura*, he is not speaking of meditation at all, but of something connected with the Divine Office. But this sort of thing could not last. This feeling that a monk must be always in prayer, like many other heroic things we read of in the lives of the solitaries of the desert, was a little exaggerated and beyond human nature. Though we do not read of our Holy Father appointing set hours of prayer, I have no doubt he did it. His rule is remarkable for its discretion; things were made easy for the weakness of human nature. Neither monks nor priests pretend to spend the whole day in contemplation. We have our work, recreation and other duties and occupations.

I wish to speak here of the special half-hour or hour of particular application of mind that is called Meditation, but which I prefer to call Prayer. Prayer includes Meditation. Meditation is a part of Prayer. There is no Prayer without it, and without prayer no one can be saved. Gerson says that "without the practice of meditation no one, save by a miracle, can attain to the real *norma* or rule of the Christian religion" (*Absque meditationis exercitio, nullus, secluso miraculo . . . ad rectissimam Christianae religionis normam attinget*). St. Liguori says

the same thing: "He who meditates not on the eternal truths cannot, without a miracle, live a Christian life; for without mental prayer we are without light." The Saints are always saying that. "Without mental prayer we are without light." "He who gives up Mental Prayer does not require the devil to push him into hell; he goes in of his own accord." These are the words of St. Teresa. St. John Chrysostom calls prayer "the nerve of the soul." As you cannot lift your finger if the nerve be cut, so you cannot raise your soul without prayer. St. Teresa says again, "Whoever perseveres in Mental Prayer may hold it for certain that Our Lord will, sooner or later, draw him out of the path of perdition and conduct him to the gate of eternal life."

I have known even religious who thought that a certain facility in ejaculations excused them from the half-hour's mental prayer. This is a mistake. This time should have a very decided effect on our lives. The reason is that we are bound to offer the service of our mental powers to God. We have got reason, imagination, feeling, will. As some great lord might require his servants to come and wait on him, so we are required to bring our mental powers to God and worship Him. "When charity is cold, the heart is silent; when charity burns, the heart cries out" (*Frigus charitatis, silentium cordis; flagrantia charitatis, clamor cordis*, St. Aug.). St. Epiphanius says: "Almighty God does not require our mouth or tongue to worship Him; the worship that pleases God is this, that our thought and the whole strength and power of our mind be borne to

Him with as little distraction as possible" (*Non indiget Deus ut os vel lingua oret; cultus autem Deo placens hic est, ut cogitationes et tota fortitudo et vis animae cum mente totâ in Deum absque ullâ distractione ferantur*). This service of our mental power is the beauty of worship. We must not think and ask merely. We must make strenuous exertions of our spirit towards our Heavenly Father. Look at the Psalms; all kinds of emotions are there. You have ADORATION in every key: God in His Heaven, on His Throne, and Angels and men and every living thing, all the creatures He has made, worship Him. You have PRAISE, for His greatness and glory and might; BLESSING, for his wonders and beneficence; all the works of the Lord bless Him; JOY, in so noble and august a King and Master; DELIGHT, in His self-sufficing sovereignty and infinite perfection; TRIUMPH in what His right hand has done; THANKS, for His Love and Fatherly solicitude; CONFESSION of faith in Him, acknowledging what He is, enumerating His attributes and the things He has done; HUMILITY, trembling with fear, anxious to propitiate Him, thinking of one's own littleness—these and a hundred more, the burden and refrain of the Psalms, the Canticles, the Prophets and the Apocalypse.

(1) We have to emulate this service of the mental powers to God, especially in time of prayer, or else fail in our duty to God. How many do it? The world neglects it altogether. It goes to Church; it, perhaps, makes five minutes of morning prayer and five minutes of evening prayer; but where is the solemn, well-carried out service of the mental

powers to God ? It is found only in the meditation of the servants of God, devout souls in their own rooms, or in churches before the Blessed Sacrament. We should not grudge this half-hour. I intend to do this great duty for all eternity. What a short time one or two half-hours are ! The fallacy creeps in that it is enough to be kind to our fellow-men, to do our duty or our work, in order to keep ourselves in the Presence of God. That is *not* enough. We must give the service of all our powers to Almighty God.

(2) It is an opportunity for us now to think about our salvation, our souls, our duties, our faults, our temptations and sins. You may say : " I know all that well enough. I know what I am ; I know my faults. I don't require any time to consider these things. Perhaps this is *bona fide* before God, perhaps it does not really offend Him ; perhaps vocal prayer and ejaculations *may* suffice. But, observe, there are two ways of knowing our faults : being acquainted with them and realizing them. We may be acquainted with them, and yet possibly never feel them, never come to grips with them as faults. We need the light of Almighty God for that. It is one thing to know your dog is dangerous ; it is another thing to realise this and wonder how you could have kept him. The danger of sloth, temper, self-indulgence, unkind speech—the non-meditating man may know it but does not realize it. We want the light of God ; and that is a sacred, delicate light—diffident, as it were. It will not struggle against our natural, carnal candle-light. Our common sense is not enough ; anti-fanaticism, the no-ideals,

no-heroics self-justification, is merely a disguise for very low spirituality indeed. *Emitte lucem tuam et veritatem tuam, Domine.*

(3) Mental prayer is a complex process, partly thinking, partly praying. This is St. Bonaventure's philosophy of Mental Prayer: "Meditation is so very necessary for prayer that prayer cannot be perfect unless meditation accompanies or precedes it (*Sic orationi meditatio est necessaria, ut omnino perfecta esse Oratio nequeat si eam Meditatio non comitetur aut præcedat*). This is true even supposing that directly you fell on your knees you were rapt into prayer. You must have meditation beforehand, and no one can do without it in some sense or other. Sustained prayer (not a mere elevation) is not as a rule possible without it. The Saints and masters of the spiritual life teach us that it is the effort to sustain our prayer, whether it is successful or not, which is most profitable. For such effort is devotion, that is, the love of God in flames. It is the most precious service that man can give to God. But it means that we must have ideas, must dwell upon those ideas, that we must have light to appreciate them, and that the heart should re-act to the light, as when the sun strikes against glass. Then it will make resolutions, acts, promises, petitions.

How are we to make Mental Prayer? The first thing is to have a settled time, before or after Mass, and to make it a rule, if possible, to let nothing interfere with it; if we have missed our Meditation we should make it up afterwards. Then we must have a programme. It is necessary for us to prepare our prayer to some extent and, for that, it is best to

have a book to tell us what to think about. But it is not necessary to do this at every meditation, and it is not necessary to use a formal Meditation-book. I should not like to trammel anyone. The best book of all is the Life and Passion of Our Lord in the Gospels, or we can use the Psalms and Hymns of the Church, or read books which state fertile spiritual principles in impressive langauge, like those of St. Augustine, or Blosius, or St. Bernard, or St. Francis of Sales. Some Lives of the Saints are great helps to Meditation, the lives of the heroes among them —the real heroes, everything about whom is great, valid, eternal and inspires the heart. On the other hand, stories of the Saints and priestly studies are a hindrance to prayer, when we have not the habit of lifting the mind. We must get matter, though we must not be the slave of matter. But no one can teach you to pray; as you grow accustomed to prayer you will learn its secrets. The great thing is to *pray*. Stick to it and do not be afraid. You say: "I can't pray, especially after Holy Communion; I am quite cold." Well, if you have no sensible devotion there is never a time when you can't say: "O my God, I am helpless. I am cold when I ought to be warm. I confess my weakness. You see what I am!" That is an excellent prayer; you could not have a better. Turn to God; make a prayer out of your very impossibility, out of the depths of your indevotion. Offer up your dryness. Sigh for a better prayer. And do not forget the consequences of neglecting Mental Prayer altogether. You will begin to forget God; you will become worldly; your life will become confused, without motives, order or

direction, with faults from inadvertence, mistakes, weaknesses. You will have no supernatural views and no aspirations. There will be a growing distaste for spiritual duties in general; Mass will be poorly said, and there will be no unction or blessing in your pastoral work. St. Teresa wrote to the Bishop of Osma—a pastor who was very careful of his flock—"Our Lord has shown me that you are wanting in what is particularly necessary to you; you neglect Mental Prayer, and from this defect arises the aridity from which your soul suffers."

St. Alphonsus says in his Visits to the Blessed Sacrament: "O what exquisite happiness to bend before the Altar and converse familiarly with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, asking pardon for the faults we have committed, exposing our necessities as a friend does to a friend, and asking His love with its attendant graces."

Points of Mental Prayer.

1. Contemplate our Blessed Lord on the mountain side. Every day almost, after the day's work, He went up on the mountain to pray. If He was in that neighbourhood He went up to Mount Olivet. He only did on that last night what He was accustomed to do. Judas, you see, knew perfectly well where He would be. See our Lord then, after the work of the day, all night in the prayer of God. Contemplate Him. Adore Him, made man to teach you, in prayer for your sake. Thank Him for this example, long to imitate Him, try to understand the benefit of long prayer—I mean prayer somewhat drawn out, not merely ejaculations. It was not

necessary at all for Him. His Heart always burned with intense love for His Heavenly Father. Ask *why* He is there. He is offering the service of His human powers. This is what the Fathers of the desert tried to do, and the founders of Religious Orders—what the contemplative orders were founded for.

2. Think of Prayer as a homage to God. Prayer is the source of light, the source of direction, the source of Grace, the source of success in work for others; for no one will succeed in doing good to others who does not pray. Think of these aspects of prayer; encourage yourself, and resolve on attention to prayer and perseverance in daily meditation. The more you pray, the easier it becomes in the end, not perhaps for the first time or two, but in the end.

3. Make a number of regrets; acts of sorrow for neglect of prayer, for escaping meditation, perhaps, when there was no need, for neglect of preparation, not taking the means; acts of sorrow for not making the most of Holy Mass, not using visits to the Blessed Sacrament properly. Regret all this humbly and quietly. Be sure He will pardon you. St. Ambrose says: "When you ask anything, God always gives you more than you ask." This saying of a Father of the Church ought to be a constant aid to recollection. If you ask for the gift of prayer, if you pray that you may take the means, be sure that you shall receive more than you ask.

X. THE DIVINE OFFICE

It is the wish of a pious heart—a dream, perhaps—that the whole earth should, day by day, lift up itself to God in worship, in praise, in thanks, and in petition. Alas! what does the world do? Yet, in a sense, this work is fulfilled. Earth can return worthy homage to God, and does so ever since He began to do it. Since the moment of His Conception, Our Lord performs this homage once for all by His Sacred Heart, but He does not confine it to Himself. What an immense prerogative—the uplifting of the homage of the Mass, from earth's bosom! Apart from the Mass He has instituted a worship carried on unceasingly day by day, by priests and Religious. That is the Divine Office, the official worship, made daily by a large number of men appointed to the task. He puts Himself at the head of it all, giving it the value, rules, and efficacy which His prayer has. He is the head, we are the members. When we pray with Him, His prayer prevails and carries ours up with His. No doubt you have often been touched by a phrase in the Gospel account of the last night of Our Lord on earth—"When they had sung a hymn" (Mark xiv, 26). Our Lord joined, I suppose—I cannot doubt it. What a glorious homage was heard then in that united praise! But that happens every day, of every year, of every century, during many hours. The sovereign mighty prayer of the Heart of Jesus

in which the ideal would be that all the world should unite, works itself out in the Divine Office—the *Opus Dei*, as St. Benedict calls it.

Read the 97th Psalm; it is a hymn of praise made by the whole earth in the presence of its Lord, our King. "Sing ye to the Lord a new canticle; because He hath done wonderful things" (the Incarnation of the Son of God). "His right hand hath wrought salvation—The Lord hath made known His salvation; He hath revealed His justice in the sight of the Gentiles. He hath remembered His mercy and His truth towards the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God." Then: "Sing joyfully to God all the earth, make melody, rejoice and sing; on the harp, with the voice of psalmody"—the hearts of men; the sea and the fulness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein; the rivers and the mountains "rejoice together at the presence of God" and "because He cometh to judge the earth." In this Psalm, all the earth worships God in the Incarnation and in the Judgement; for His Love and His Justice. Or read the *Venite exultemus* (Ps. xciv), or the *Dominus regnavit* (Ps. xcii), or the *Deus misereatur* (Ps. lxvi), or the *Benedictus*, or the *Magnificat*, and understand and confess that there are no such noble words as those of the Psalms for united prayer to God.

It was a noble conception, the Psalmody of the Desert. The monastic Orders adopted it; the Cathedral Churches took it up as their official task; and soon each priest, in his isolation (greater or less) became a member of the great choir—a type

and anticipation of that rapturous praise which will gush from the hearts of angels and men, like the spontaneous song which joy draws from birds, for all eternity. We should love the Divine Office—this *sacrificium studiosum*, as Cassian calls it—this *laus perennis*. "O my soul, bless the Lord, and let all that is within me praise His holy name!"

What are the spiritual benefits of the Divine Office? It is a stimulus and prompting to prayer. It furnishes the ideas that feed prayer. The Psalms, lections, hymns are themselves prayers. It is absolute prayer; prayer in inspired words; the Church's official prayer; Christ in our midst. The Psalms have been expressly designed by the Holy Spirit to formulate, express and intensify the lifting up of the hearts God has made.* O precious words of the Psalms! Strong, fresh, unusual, dimly romantic words, half understood but full of associations! words with the ripeness, the mystery, the fragrance of ancient times—times of simplicity, of poetry, of the nearness of heavenly things! Words that express the dealings of God with His chosen people—His love, His watchfulness, His sternness, His triumph, but which adapt themselves (and no wonder, for they were formed and woven together with all that in view) to body forth, and to chant, the ineffable dispensation of the God-Man—of Bethlehem, of Nazareth, and of Calvary; of Pentecost, of the Church, and of the Saints of every age! Words that make known the deep things of the

* This passage has been repeated in the Sermon preached at the opening of the Monastic Choir at Downside.

ocean of man's heart, map out the mind, stimulate the fancy, inflame the affections! Words that have a Divine aptitude for making the soul see Jesus before its eyes, and a Divine adaptability to all its own varying emotions! Words that are not the words of a dry reasoner, but take their colour from the living universe—the earth, the sea, the firmament, the hills, the rivers, the forest, the deserts, the seasons and the storms! Words that the generations of the Saints have prayed with, wept over! Words that the Holy Spirit gave for the Christian heart to use! St. Augustine, when, after his conversion, he retired to a villa to commune with Almighty God, speaks thus of the effect the Psalms made on his mind, "O my God, what words I said to Thee in those days, how I lifted my voice when I read the Psalms of David, songs full of faith, accents of piety! I was then rude in Thy genuine love. How I poured out my voice in those Psalms! How through them I was on fire towards Thee! And I burned to recite them in the whole world (he wanted the whole world to join him); I read and I burned." (*Quas tibi Deus meus voces dedi, cum legerem Psalmos David, cantica fidelia, et sonos pietatis. . . . rudis in germano amore Tuo. . . . Quas tibi voces dabam in Psalmis illis, et quomodo in Te inflammabar ex eis, et accendebar eas recitare toto orbe terrarum . . . Legebam et ardebam*, S. Aug., Confess. ix, 4).

We should be glad to have regular, enjoined, fixed, common, opportunity of discharging our duty of worship and prayer. It is a part of our priestly dedication. The Divine Office will ensure

regular prayer and a constant remembrance of our Heavenly Father.

How are we to recite the Office ? Well, the Divine Office requires a little study if we are to get the most out of it. St. Augustine lays down the general principle thus : " Let each one bring home to himself the words and their sense, in such a manner that he gives praise, groans within himself, and becomes sore afraid, when the discourse of the Psalm leads him to do so. If the Psalm be prayerful, let us pray ; if a groaning, let us groan ; if rejoiceful, let us rejoice ; if hopeful, let us hope ; if fearful, let us be afraid ; for what is written there is a mirror of ourselves " (*Se ad verba sententiasque accommodet, ita ut laudet, gemat, extimescat sicut Psalmi voces indicant. Si orat Psalmus, orate ; si gemat, gemite ; si gratulatur, gaudete ; si sperat, sperate ; si timet, timete ; omnia enim quae hic conscripta sunt, speculum nostrum est*). Concerning the manner of our recitation of the Divine Office, St. Benedict, in his Holy Rule, gives three admirable words of direction. It should be *pure, strenue ac devote ;* that is, with as little distraction as possible, a pure stream of prayer ; taking all possible pains ; with the love of Almighty God in the heart, making use of the words to intensify the devotion of the heart. To put this advice in a practical form, I should advise you that you begin always by putting yourself in the presence of God, have a fixed and undisturbed time for its recitation over-night or early in the morning, and a quiet place ; not a place where friends talk, but in the church, or in the solitude of your room, or outside in your garden. Then, we should

pronounce the words and recite it leisurely; we should also take such pains as will help us to do it piously.

I am aware of the danger of staleness. But staleness only visits those, in the first place, who are content with the merest superficial acquaintance with the Psalms. We ought never to grow tired of them. Their *Literal* sense is full of interest: the personality of David, a type of Christ; Sion and the glorious days of old; Israel and the romance of its history; the Temple and the awful Presence of God. Then there is the *Messianic* application, to a great extent a matter of Faith and the *Spiritual* sense, intended by the Holy Spirit, dwelt on so much by the Fathers, inspired to meet our needs. Or, it will visit, in the second place, those who do not feel with the Liturgy and live in it and apply the Divine Office to it and understand that it is the prayer of the Sacred Heart, of the Church, and of the Brethren with Our Lord in the midst. Or, in the third place, it may visit those who do not want to *pray*, or exert themselves; for if we are in earnest about our own souls, all the words of the Office have an application and association to ourselves and with our spiritual wants and needs. Either in the general sense of the words and in a word here and there—or even with no reference to the words at all, should they be those so frequently repeated—we should be able to lift up our hearts to God. Devotion to the Saints should be most useful to us in this respect. We should learn the details of their lives and rouse ourselves to honour them on their day. Then the commonest and most frequently

repeated words will become significant indeed : "*Ecce sacerdos magnus*," "*Similabo eum viro sapienti*," "*Veni sponsa Christi*," and the rest—they have a fresh meaning to us when we connect them with the holy Apostles, Martyrs, Doctors, Confessors, Virgins, with St. Augustine and St. Ambrose, St. Gregory, St. Patrick, St. Francis, St. Thomas of Aquin, St. Vincent of Paul, St. Agnes, St. Gertrude, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Teresa and all the host of Saints in Heaven.

Other Devotions are laudable in a Priest, but only if they do not interfere with the *Opus Dei* and with one's Liberty of Spirit. We must not overload ourselves with devout practices other than the Divine Office, or let ourselves be tied to them or become scrupulous about them. Liberty of spirit means just this, that we are not tied to devotions or practices for small reasons, and retain reasonableness and clear-headedness in the use of the means given into our hands to do honour to God and keep ourselves holy in His sight.

Points of Mental Prayer.

1. Place before your imagination the Sacred Heart of Jesus, when He was on earth, lifting itself up to His Heavenly Father in prayer and praise. Never, before the Incarnation, had such a holocaust ascended from the earth. For it was absolute, perfect, infinite in value, efficacy and acceptableness. By it God was praised and worshipped in a way worthy of Himself—and that by a human heart.

That great hymn of Praise uttered by the Sacred Heart goes on for all time and eternity. The prayer

and the praise of redeemed souls, of the Church, is carried up with it, and is joined with it. It is the privilege of Priests especially to join in that great unending prayer.

Make Acts (1) of ardent supplication to be admitted into this Choir which Jesus leads; (2) of desire to join in the glorious work; (3) of union, in saying your Office, with the perfect dispositions of Christ, that He may make up for your deficiencies.

2. Consider the Church of all the centuries, and of the whole world; consider the desire of Jesus that it should join in His great work of prayer and praise; and consider the outpouring of the Grace of the Holy Spirit given to the Church for this end; consider the Holy Liturgy, with all its rites, its readings, its chants, its days and its rules—the object of the Church's constant solicitude; observe in all this the anticipation of the eternal prayer and praise of Heaven. Pray (1) that you may feel yourself to be a partaker in this appointed dispensation; (2) that you may value and esteem the Psalms, the lections, the antiphons, the prayers; (3) that you may follow with devotion all holy days and seasons, and the recurrence of every Saint of God.

3. Regret and beg pardon for (1) Disrespect in the place and time of saying your Office; (2) for putting it off and for hurrying your recitation; (3) especially for all wilful omissions; (4) for distractions, whether caused by want of remote preparation—*e.g.*, study of the Psalms and the Liturgy—or by sloth while actually reciting.

XI. OFFICE AND HOLINESS OF THE PRIEST.

By Ordination, a frail and imperfect human creature is invested with a character, and office, and a prerogative so supernatural, so intimately related to Jesus Christ Himself, that men, for the most part, utterly fail to understand or appreciate what comes to pass. This difficulty God must have foreseen when He decreed the Incarnation. The more splendid the gift or visitation of God, the more intense should be the impression on human faculty. But human faculty, for various reasons, has always proved non-responsive. It would seem that the average mind or heart has only power to admit a small proportion of the light or heat, of the glory or the awfulness, of the Divine communications or dispensations. It would seem as if a considerable part of the magnificence and profusion of God's dealings with men were wasted; as if they had not eyes strong enough to see it right, nerves sensitive enough to be stirred by it, or a heart wide and tender enough to take it in. This waste is too real and sad a fact. It is one of the aspects of the indifference and the hardness of men. It is made up for by what happens with the few, the chosen ones; by the breadth and the intensity of those hearts which really give themselves to the God who seeks them; by the lifting up and the transformation which those souls experience who do not resist the inpouring of a power which makes men see more than

nature can see, and feel what even their intellectual forces of themselves could only suspect. It is said in the proverb: "The blind and the lame shall not come into the Temple" (2 Kings v, 8). Let us pray that it may be given to us to enter into that glorious Temple in which are present God's goodness, God's mercy, God's solicitude for men, in all their evidence and splendour; that no blindness on our part may prevent us from being daily more and more impressed with the Incarnation; and that our whole life may be one continued advance in realising what is contained in those dispensations of Christ, given to His Church, which we can never adequately penetrate or appreciate.

The Priesthood is a consequence, a development, of the Incarnation. That God should take up human nature, be a human being, live and suffer, is very much. Had there been nothing more, so great a proof of God's real love and care, of the value of our souls, and of His wish to gather us all to His bosom for ever, must have changed the face of the moral world. Had there been nothing more, that Divine example would have been an undying possession, those Divine instructions would have been a perpetual treasure, and that Cross would have taught its precious secret to every generation. But the design of God was to perpetuate the Incarnation, not merely in its moral effect, but in its physical impressiveness. I am omitting to consider, for the moment, the purchasing of Grace and glory. The Incarnate God, besides redeeming us, laboured personally to help and urge us to make use of that Redemption. One way, as just stated, was His

Divine precept and example; the other was the Divine ministry to which He gave Himself. Both these benefits were to be perpetuated; the first by the *Ecclesia docens*, the Gospels and the tradition of the Catholic Church, the second by the dispensation of Holy Orders.

We must consider that the Ministry exercised by Our Blessed Lord upon earth consisted in a personal and visible conveying of spiritual gifts to men. Thus He forgave sins, by word and by gesture combined; He gave the Holy Spirit in the same way. Thus, also, He sent His Apostles and the seventy-two with certain powers. But above all, even by the sole fact of His Incarnation He stood before men as their mediator and advocate with God, and by His Sacred Passion and Death He was both High Priest of the grandest sacrifice that could be, and victim of the same great sacrifice. Now, there is no absolute need of any ministry between God and Man. The essential thing is, that God, on the one hand, should draw man, visit man, give man spiritual life; on the other, that man should respond, receive, worship, pray, and have in him the life of Grace. This august intercommunion might come about without sight or sound. It is essentially a communion of spirit with spirit. But, speaking of the infinitely larger proportion of God's dealings with man, and without for a moment denying that He can always do as He pleases, God has always willed that there should be a visible ministry and outward dispensation. Even in Paradise, when intercommunion between earth and Heaven was at its swiftest, its purest, and its most intense, there

seems to have been, at times, some kind of an awful sensible Presence, imparting to that communion the elements of place and time. And the fact of the Incarnation is at once the demonstrative proof that God thinks it best for man that Divine gifts should be embodied in a visible dispensation, and affords the type and exemplar of the way in which that visible dispensation was to be carried on to the consummation of the world.

For we see that, by taking human nature and appearing as a visible minister of Divine things, Almighty God most powerfully helped poor weak and blind mortals to draw near to His invisible majesty; and that in five ways. First, as has been hinted, He imparted to Divine visitations the elements of time and place, thus enabling the spirit, which often cannot distinguish between its imagination and true reality, to make more sure and certain of spiritual things; and thus also rousing the attention and effort of the will, which is much assisted by having to face definite objective conditions; for a man may dream all day unless clocks strike and trumpets call. Next, He stimulated men's attention by coming to them as Person to person; communicating with them, not by a mere written word, or by any mere signs or sounds, but face to face, eye meeting eye, soul speaking to soul. There is no influence which so effectually draws or leads men as a living presence. Thirdly, He surrounded His personal presence with just so much mystery as to arrest consideration, and to keep up interest and admiration. His origin, His manner of life, His action and His claims, were all

mysterious; He inspired awe, and caused men to feel they were in the presence of the Unseen. Fourthly, the Incarnation demanded from men, if they would yield to the call of Jesus, an imperative exercise of that humility, or lowliness of spirit, in the absence of which all communion with God is impossible. For Jesus came poor, needy, weak, oppressed and suffering; and no man who gloried in money, in strength, in intellect or in power could possibly accept Him. The necessity of seeking out, of confessing to, of obeying a Man, "surrounded with infirmity," made lowliness of heart an essential. Aloofness, self-sufficiency, the critical spirit, self in any shape—which things are the chief hindrances of our drawing nigh to God—were all ruthlessly challenged by the Babe of Bethlehem, by the poor Man of Nazareth, by the suffering on Calvary. And lastly, the visible Ministry of Christ on earth roused and kept in full activity that spirit of Faith without which men are blind and insensible to the supernatural world. Both awe and humility are, in a sense, the expression of Faith. But what is here meant in particular is the sense of God, one's soul and the life to come. All these realities are difficult to grasp, slippery to hold. A Minister puts them into concrete forms, by speech, action, sacrament, or symbol. But if you believe he is a truly qualified Minister, sent, invested and ordained, his speech, his act, his ministration, what in the order of nature would before long grow usual and unimpressive, acquire and ever retain an element of impressiveness—Faith

correcting and re-inforcing with inexhaustible efficacy the outward and the sensible.

This Ministry, undertaken by Jesus Christ for the good of souls that He longed to save, was to be continued to the end of time. "As the Father hath sent me, I also send you" (John xx, 21). There was to be not merely the record of His life, not merely the enforcement of faith and morality by preaching, but a visible Church, with visible Sacraments, dispensed and administered by men. In this, the Christian dispensation, the chief element was, undoubtedly, the men. Without human agency, constantly renewed, never interrupted, there could be no system of visible and external means and opportunities of Grace. That system was not to be a mere mechanical reproduction or repetition of words or acts. It was to be, what Our Lord's ministry was, the dealing with persons by a person. Therefore, from among men, persons were to be set aside and "ordained" for this purpose. A Priest, therefore, is one who is appointed and endowed to carry on the Ministry of Christ. Necessarily there was not only an "appointment." The sacramental acts which the Priest has to perform cannot be performed by any powers of his own. Thus the Priest is the result of a direct interference of Divine Omnipotent power—analogous to those interferences which have created worlds, originated life, originated intelligence, breathed the Spirit on Pentecost, and set up the never-ceasing wonder of supernatural Grace. We must add to this list the ordination endowment of a Priest; it is as mighty a work, as startling, as new, as far-reaching. It is the con-

tinuation of Christ on this earth; not in His personal human presence—except sacramentally—but in the five-fold influence of which I have spoken. The priest's office is to bring home to men, with the elements of time and space, and through human attention, the spiritual, the supernatural, the hidden, the things above. He is to do this by acting personally on persons, a living pressure on the living. He is a man of mysterious powers, not to be investigated or classed by human sense or science, which makes men feel they are in the presence of the Unseen. He necessarily demands from men the exercise of humility and of the childlike gospel spirit, being endowed as he is, and yet so human and frail. And his very existence is designed to keep human faith alive, by his presenting to faith, in his own person, a constant visible religious presence which somehow should never grow common, or stale, or ineffectual. As Christ said by Isaias: The Lord hath anointed *Me* . . . and the ancient deserts shall flourish once more: And you shall be called the Priests of the Lord; Ministers of one God, shall be said to you! (lxi, 6).

This, and nothing less, is the institution of the Priest—Christ's power and presence, to such an extent as to enable us to say "Christ Himself"—to be the world's salvation, by that constant ministerial and missionary assertion to men of the salvation of the great Minister and Missionary.

Thus we have this most startling situation; that a human being, whilst still subject to ignorance, to weakness, to innumerable imperfections, and to the certainty of sinning, if not gravely yet at least

lamentably, is invested with a power which is described by the Council of Trent as *Vicarius Christi* (Sess. xiv, cap. 5), and trusted with the essentially Divine prerogative of conferring spiritual Grace. Here we are brought face to face with that terrible possibility described by the Fathers and St. Bernard—a possibility that the dignity and the power may be held by a bad man. No wonder that St. Bernard calls the conjunction "monstrous"—that is, unnatural, repulsive and almost incredible. "*Monstruosa res, gradus summus et animus infimus.* It is horrible when you find such a dignity joined to such degradation."

Look at the unworthy priest. He is "ordained"; that cannot be undone. Perhaps, nay most probably, when the sacred unction was given to him, when the Bishop conferred those terrifying powers, he was innocent, well-intentioned, and even moved to devout resolution. And, by neglecting prayer and mortification, he has not only fallen into many sins, but he has contracted a certain hardening of the heart that prevents him from really turning back to God. Such a priest, in his worldliness, his self-worship, and his grossness, presents himself, day by day, to the flock of Christ—to the good, simple poor, to the tempted, to the hard-pressed in mind and body, to the thronging souls for whom Christ died—as the dispenser of the Divine things that the Redeemer of mankind has left for the salvation of all. He presents himself as a man who can utter words that are nothing less than the word of God; who can claim to be obeyed as Christ; who can lift his hand and forgive sin; who can bow down over the bread

and wine on the Altar and convert it into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. This man, with his lax life, his sordid avarice, his gluttony, his fondness for drink, his selfishness and his abominable talk!—perhaps with his shameful ignorance and his disgraceful dirt! Is there any other word for such a combination except St. Bernard's word—"Monstrous!" If there is a judgement—if there is retribution for deliberate wickedness, there will certainly be judgement and retribution for the man who thus dares to act the Person of Christ whilst steeped in sin and unworthiness.

The principal claim, therefore, which his Ordination has upon a priest is personal Holiness. There may be others. A priest must sometimes be learned, generally be zealous. But chiefly he is bound to be Holy. In his Ordination, there is, clearly and visibly, the attempt on the part of Christ to inspire into that man His own spirit. When the Bishop's hands are laid upon him, it is as when Christ breathed upon the Apostles, and said "Receive the Holy Ghost." That action of Christ, so significant in its Oriental symbolic fashion, imparts the desire of that Sacred Heart to send forth all His own soul into the being of the man He has chosen. That pressing of the hand upon the head, which is the present equivalent for the breathing, signifies the same thing—the wish of Christ to put Himself into the being of the candidate. That anointing, which is a kind of sensible translation of that constantly used phrase of the Old and New Testament—"unction" in the sense of infused or imparted graces or gifts—proclaims that the august qualities which dignified

the human soul of Christ are bestowed upon the candidate for the priesthood. Christ was "anointed more than His fellows" (Ps. xliv, 8) with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In Ordination, although those gifts are not directly given, yet it is implied that the Holy Spirit is given, and if He is given it should be not in one respect or partially, but wholly, even as He came down upon the Man, Christ Jesus. These most significant actions—the imposition of hands and the anointing—speak plainly of the mighty action of that God Who stands hidden behind the Episcopal Minister, by which, in His plenitude of power, He infuses into a human being what is His own glorious endowment. Can we bear the thought that this imperial exertion of beneficent power should encounter the corruption of sin?—that the glorious and Divine emanations of the Kingly Heart of Jesus should have to be mixed up with the abominations of pride and sensuality? It seems as if He ought to interfere to prevent such a sacrilege; as if He ought to make the ground yawn and the fire burst forth, as of old, to put a stop to such a profanation, to avenge such a blasphemous insult.

As St. Augustine has said of the Priest, *Duas res professus est, Clericatum et Sanctitatem.* The Priest has promised two things—"to be a Cleric and to be holy." The prayer of the Church, as it was of the Synagogue, is *Sacerdotes tui induantur justitiam.* "Let thy Priests be clad with holiness." In the words of St. Thomas of Aquin, *Per sacrum Ordinem aliquis deputatus ad dignissima Mysteria quibus ipsi Christo servitur in Sacramento altaris; ad quod requiritur major Sanctitas interior quam requirat*

etiam Religiosus Status. By holy Orders a man is dedicated to Mysteries the most august, wherein Christ Himself is served, in the Sacrament of the Altar ; a thing which requires greater Holiness than does the Religious State (*Summa* ii, ii, *Qu.* 184, *Art.* 8).

First of all, then, a Priest, by his Ordination, is bound to show himself externally as a holy man, set apart for a holy work ; a man who not only is distinguished from the crowd of the sinful and the worldly, but even from the flock of the ordinary servants of God. For the sake of God's people, a Priest, even if unhappily he is very imperfect, must carefully preserve the outward appearance of Holiness. Let him not scandalize the children of the Heavenly Father. In his dress let him be priestly, conforming himself to the law and to a good custom. A priest who is not dressed like a priest is judged to be ashamed of his priestly character. A priest who is not dressed like a priest so far destroys that influence over his flock which is given him by the very fact of his being an ordained minister of the Most High. The silent sermon that is preached by the visible presence of a divinely-gifted man, ceases when that man seems to be impatient of the order and state which he ought to be proud of. And if the people are tempted to disregard him, he himself also loses that protection which the ecclesiastical habit always affords to its wearer ; that help to resist human respect, that immunity from certain forms of temptation, that fine sense of Christian self-respect, that realization of an august corporate fellowship whose honour is

in his hand, which a man puts on with the vesture of the clerical state. Let him appear as a priest, and let him behave like a priest. Let him be regular, careful in each duty, punctual and devoted. Let him be above reproach in his private and public life, particular in his relations with others, clean and honest in his speech, and Christian in his temper. In the words of the Council of Trent, let him "be an example to the people of God in behaviour, in speech, and in silence, remembering that which is written, "Be ye holy, because I am holy" (*Ut in conversatione, sermone, scientiâ, Dei populo praeeant, memores ejus quod scriptum est, Sancti estote quia Ego sanctus sum*).

But it will be very sad and miserable for the priest if his Holiness is all on the outside. Nay, rather, it will be practically impossible, although he may honourably try, to behave outwardly as a minister of Christ, whilst interiorly his soul is the dwelling-place of deliberate sin. Ah! let him remember the Old Testament cry, re-echoed in the Ordination service, *Mundamini qui fertis vasa Domini* (Isaias lii, 11.) Be clean, ye who bear the vessels of the Lord! For it is not the sacred vessels only you carry, but the Body of the Lord Himself; it is not merely that your hands touch what is holy, but that your whole being is clothed and penetrated with the supernal power and dignity of sacramental efficacy and Divine ministration.

The groundwork and the essential element of personal Holiness is the horror of sin. A priest sometimes seems to lose this. The hideousness of sin is expressed and defined by the Catholic dogma of

everlasting punishment. But sin is hideous and detestable for a much deeper reason than its doom. A priest who has learnt from childhood to think of his God, of His Saviour—to commune with Him—to keep Him first and last in his thought, his attention and his affection—such a priest must, at one time of his life, have dreaded deliberate sin as a mother dreads to harm her child. Not only his reason and his faith, but his very nerves and temperament must, in his earlier days, have cried out with pain, even at the thought of offending God; of adding to the sufferings of Calvary. Why does the priest grow callous as he lives longer? Why does the priest's heart harden and darken as the days multiply in which he handles the Body of Christ, and forms the Word of God in his mind to utter it to the people? Why does not that blessed Body and Blood keep his conscience tender? Why does not all that holy conceiving and uttering keep the memory active and the heart sensitive?

No process, however holy, will keep the human fibres alive and sensitive unless it is a reflex process. The intellect, the will, the imagination may go on working, and working well, and working on the highest and the holiest material, and yet it is possible that all that work, accomplished as it is by the man and within the man, may, in great measure, assume the character of external work. Unless a man has the habit of reflex consideration—what am I doing? Do I appreciate what I am doing? Do I offer to God what I am doing? Am I prompt, sincere, zealous, negligent, sorry for my faults, careful about amendment?—unless the priest has this

habit of mind, his most priestly work is like work done by someone else and not by himself. In truth, such work is really external—not to his mind and faculty, but to the innermost centre of his soul, where the vital and personal in a man is concentrated. In a word, the failure of a priest to lead a recollected, meditative, reflective life effectually prevents even such Divine work as Mass, Sacraments and preaching from keeping him in the loving and adoring presence of his God. Now, to lose the sense of God as Father, Friend, Redeemer and Last End, is to lose one's sensitiveness to sin and thus destroy one's standard of holiness.

Let the priest, then, resume his practice of recollection and meditation. Let him have his books that describe his state and its requirements; but, more especially, let him put his mind to reflection and to internal acts, daily, at regular times, so that he may never forget or neglect. Such a priest will soon grow sensitive once more to the hideousness of deliberate sin in a man endowed by the Holy Spirit.

It is not enough for priestly holiness to dread grave sin. The Priest must also learn to fear the approaches to grave sin. A venial sin, however slight, is an unfaithfulness, a letting down of the healthy temperature, a setting of the foot on the downward path. A habit of deliberate venial sin, and an attachment to such a sin, constitutes the soul in a thoroughly dangerous state. The fibre is relaxed, the heart is in fetters, the will is weakened, the soul is off its guard. Let the priest include sins like these in his reflection before God.

I would go a little further. Sin has infected many

innocent or indifferent details of human life. It comes to pass that a man who is not strict in certain matters, not themselves sinful, but too nearly associated with sin, cannot be called "holy." Dress, eating, drinking, amusements, company, reading—it need not be said how often the monster sin puts on and wears the lineaments of some act which come under these heads. Therefore, no priest can live up to the Holiness of his Ordination unless he is careful—nay, somewhat scrupulous—about mixing with the world and conforming himself to the doings of the world. The world—even ordinary Catholics—have lamentably low ideals. If the priest employs himself, or amuses himself, with the people of the world, he is sure to contaminate himself. If he drinks with the world, feasts with the world, enjoys himself with the world, he surely and certainly pulls himself down, so that he must feel when he puts on his Mass vestments, or faces his flock officially, that he is not what he should be or what his people think him to be.

Let us cast ourselves at the feet of Jesus Christ, and implore of Him to give us and preserve in us by His Grace a cleanness, a Holiness, suitable to the high endowments of our Ordination. Let us pray for a horror of sin; for the resolution to avoid its chances, its possibilities, its probabilities; for the generosity to renounce and the courage to resist; for a sensitive conscience; for a thoughtful heart; and for a thorough acceptance of that life of reserve, of modesty, of sobriety, which the Catholic rule and tradition prescribe to the Priests of the New Covenant.

Points of Mental Prayer.

1. Place yourself before Jesus Who breathes on you. See in that action the ardent desire of His Sacred Heart in exercising that marvellous creative work of making a priest. (1) Adore the Sacred Heart. (2) Humble yourself at the thought of the uncleanness and the selfishness of your heart. (3) Long ardently that your whole being may be cleansed, made beautiful, and lifted up by your ordination, that you may be less unworthy to be *Vicarius Christi*.

2. Am I holy? Does my Priesthood make me detest sin; fill me with contrition and remorse; make me resolve to avoid occasions; brace me to self-restraint and mortification? Am I content with God? Do I not live to exercise my priesthood so as to glorify myself, to draw attention, to gratify affection, to indulge in ease, to get money? Am I not impatient at being kept from such exercise? "*Pars mea Dominus?*" "*Inclina Domine aurem Tuam et exaudi me, quoniam inops et pauper sum ego. Custodi animam meam, quoniam sanctus sum.*" (Ps. lxxxv, 1, 2).

3. "Let Thy Grace, O Almighty God, assist us, that we, who have undertaken the office of the priesthood, may serve Thee worthily and devoutly in all purity and good conscience.

"And if we cannot live in so great innocence as we ought, grant us, at least, fittingly to bewail the sins we have committed, and, in the spirit of humility and the resolution of a good will, to serve Thee more fervently for the time to come" (*Imit. of Christ*, Bk. iv, c. 11).

XII. THE DEDICATION OF A PRIEST

The ancient Temple of the Jewish people was not only "holy"—that is, set apart, protected from profanation, surrounded with silence and solicitously cared for, but it was "dedicated." That is to say, on a certain day, amidst the prayers of the King and people, and the symbolic splendours of ritual service, the glory of the Lord fell upon it, filled it and possessed it. Thus God made it His own House, and dwelt therein.

Happy is the priest whom God thus dedicates and consecrates. We may hope that there are very few priests on whom, at their Ordination, this glory of the Lord does not fall. That is to say, in addition to their Orders, and to their being solemnly and visibly set apart for the ministry of the Most High, all priests (we may trust) receive such an infusion of grace as inclines the heart to God, causes the will to adhere fervently to Him, and overflows on their whole being, making them taste and see that the Lord is with them and that they in a most special sense belong to Him. Thus, the dedication of a priest is a two-fold process—a descent of the Holy Spirit; and a fervent corresponding movement on the part of the priest, as expressed in that cry of the clerical state, "*Dominus pars haereditatis meae*" "*Pars mea Dominus.*" (Ps. xv, 5; Lam. iii, 24).

The portion of the priest is God, and God alone. Others have appointed them work of various kinds

in the world; they must aim at producing, controlling, amassing, distributing, the various means and resources of nature, of commerce, of politics. In a true sense the Lord is the only portion of all men; whatever is done or suffered must be for Him and His will. But the priest is freed and absolved from even the lawful and necessary aims and pursuits of humanity, in order that he may give himself, in the most particular and intimate way, to the most immediate service of Him who has a right to all service. For this, the people deny themselves that the Priest may be free from all sordid care. For this, is the order of the clergy surrounded with observance that they may have no occasion to contend, or to grasp, or to descend into the dusty arena where the world works out its purposes and ambitions. For this, is the command given that tenths and offerings be made to the Priesthood, that they may give themselves up to a service, unspoiled by passion, uninterrupted by daily toil for bread.

The priest, therefore, should seriously, and with all his heart, make it plain to himself by reflection that the Lord, and the Lord only, is his portion. If he cannot honestly say this—if he hanker after pursuits that are secular, cherishes ambitions that concern self and not God, covets possessions that are not suitable or not necessary to one who is God's special minister, then he is not, as we say, priestly, and may hardly deserve to be called a priest. In an extreme case, it may be said of him that he is living under false pretences; one who takes the money and the respect that is paid to his

cloth and, at the same time, neglects the work and duty for which alone the things are given. St. Jerome—and after him St. Bernard—goes as far as to say "the priest who possesses anything except God, cannot say that God is his portion." That is, the priest who clings to anything he can do without, cannot say *Pars mea Dominus*. This is a high standard to set before the clergy—perhaps an impossible one. But can there be any doubt, discuss it as we please, that the Divine ideal for a Priest is to be able to say without affectation that God is his portion and inheritance? Here is a passage from St. Eucherius, the great Prelate who gave its form to the tradition of the Church of Lyons; "Wouldst thou know what is the difference between the priests of God and the priests of Pharoah? Pharoah giveth land to his priests. But the Lord, to His priests, giveth no land; He saith to them, I am your portion. Observe, then, ye priests of God who read this, the difference between priest and priest; lest perhaps those who hold earthly portions, and who devote themselves to the pursuits and solicitudes of earth, may seem to be rather priests of Pharoah than of God" (i, p. 246). And let us ponder those words of the Church addressed to the young aspirant who comes for the Tonsure: "If you are contented with God you have come with good omens to the clerical state, because then your practice agrees with your name" (i, p. 249). Contented with God! O my soul, what a full and happy thought! Do I not know well that nothing else, in the long run, can really content me? Do I not know that even if I spent my life in getting and holding, and were

successful beyond expectation in filling my purse and surrounding myself with all I require, yet the hour must come when, unless I have gathered true riches, I shall be left poor and destitute, my hands empty and my heart craving ? Can I not be content with God—with God who will never fail me or desert me ?—with God Who will truly and amply fill and satisfy my immortal nature ? Why have I hitherto failed to be content with God ? Why am I, at this moment, so far from feeling that He is enough for me—that with Him, even if all things fail, I am rich enough ? It is my blindness, my folly, my want of reflection, my cowardice !

There are three vices in a priest which spoil his dedication to God ; which lay him open, like a temple whose doors are broken down and whose guards are fled, to the incursions of those evil things which are the enemies of God.

The first is Ambition. St. Bernard says of it, as a rooted vice or passion, that " Ambition is the adoration of the devil (i, 404)—alluding to the words which the Evil One addressed to the Saviour—" All these will I give Thee if falling down thou wilt adore me " (St. Matth. iv, 9). Ambition is, in itself, no more than the desire of honour and consideration. It might certainly seem as if, in these countries, there was not much scope for Ambition. What can a priest hope for in the way of honour ? What posts or preferments are possible to him that are really worth striving for ? What fame, or reputation, or credit, worthy of a manly nature, is to be had on the lowly and limited stage on which a priest has to play his part ? Nevertheless, as I need not say,

there are some places or preferments more or less worth having, even to an ambitious priest. They are usually small prizes, insignificant triumphs of place or preferment, but is it not true that the hankering after them may do as much harm to the soul as if it were a question of something really great? Nay, I will say more. The very smallness of what is to be had, and the petty nature of the contest, may breed in the man who gives rein to such ambitions a sordidness which, though not a damning sin, will as effectually spoil all natural dignity and prevent the work of Grace. When men intrigued for places in the State, for Cardinals' hats and splendid Bishoprics, they often betrayed their God and stained their souls with mortal sin. But when they repented, they generally repented with the thoroughness of a magnanimous nature. It is possible that even in these days, priests may be found who will go on all their lives pushing to get past other priests in the humble and dusty road, never giving themselves wholly to God's love; who will strive and quarrel, backbite and intrigue for shreds and scraps of the most homely glory, and thus spoil both their spirit of prayer, their devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, and their work for souls. And sometimes—that is, when some honour rather higher than usual is missed, or where some special call is made on his obedience and his self-denial—such a one may find his debased and demoralised nature refuse to respond to the strain, and he will go wrong. Thus Ambition, even with us, may come perilously near to that excess which St. Bernard describes as the adoration of the devil.

It should not be very hard for a priest to fight against his Ambition. It must be recognised that there are some natures which are especially impregnated with vanity and self-esteem. These disturbing qualities may have been strengthened in the Seminary course ; for without careful spiritual training, it is almost invariably found that a young man's vanity grows during his studies and his advance to the priesthood. What then must he do when he finds himself engaged in pastoral work, and is disturbed, as he will be, by the stings and throbs of Ambition ? First, as in all temptations, he must adhere with fidelity to all his spiritual duties. Next, he must make a compact with himself, in God's Grace, never to say a word in disparagement of a brother priest. This practice will almost of itself kill in a priest's breast the spirit of Ambition. It is not only that such a practice is bountifully and markedly blessed by God—God is always doing to us as we do to others—but Ambition, like most other evil propensities, is always materially weakened by a steady refusal to let it express itself in words and acts. When the ambitious priest sins it is chiefly in words. He talks uncharitably of others, disparaging them ; or else he complains or shows anger and disappointment. Let him keep silence and many sins and imperfections are avoided. He may not at once extinguish in his heart the unworthy longing for things that are not his portion. But he will never be carried very far. And when he finds himself wanting what he has not got, chafing under the repression of his aspirations, vexed that his powers, as it seems to him, have not

full scope, annoyed by the preference given to others, and by the inefficiency or folly of the men who have the conduct of affairs, let him then, in the spirit of a man, fall back on his principles, or the lessons of his Saviour, or his priestly profession. What does it matter if, for the few years of his life, one has to be in the background ? What real harm is it to be unknown ? How small and mean will place and power appear when age comes on and we have to prepare for the judgement ? It is the hidden ones who do most for the Kingdom of God on earth. Jesus Christ taught this when He chose, during all His life, to be obscure, unknown and despised. Like St. Dorotheus in the desert, the humble and hidden priest is often a worker of wonders. That Saint used to say that obedience to superiors had the effect of making God obey you. So, it is certain that the conversion of souls, the good of the diocese, the triumph of the Church are far more effectually promoted by a priest of retiring modesty and of interior life than by all the noisy preachers and the smart administrators. Our Lord is full of Grace and generosity to those who can say with generosity " The Lord is my portion."

The next thing that spoils the priest's dedication is Avarice. This is that love of money which, like Ambition, springs from the corrupt root of self-love. It was a far more frequent priestly vice in the older days than it is now. Peter of Blois calls Avarice " the leaven or yeast of the clergy which corrupteth the whole mass." But no one who knows anything of clerical life in the English-speaking countries can shut his eyes to the fact that many of the

shortcomings of priests are caused by the grasping for money and clinging to money. The great spiritual writers of older days have felt themselves called upon to utter the strongest warnings against the avarice of priests. In the Old Testament times it was often an evil and a curse. Isaias speaks of "the impudent dogs who never have enough" (lvi, 11); Jeremias complains that from the least to the greatest all are given to covetousness" (vi, 13); and Malachi asks if there be a priest who will "shut the doors (of the Holy of Holies) or light the fire upon the altar for nothing" (i, 10). St. Jerome in his day, St. Bernard in his, St. Charles Borromeo later, and St. Alphonsus still more recently, have raised their voices in bitter words over this failing of the clergy.

The peculiar evil of covetousness is not difficult to understand. Let us observe that it does not seem to be so natural to a man, so ingrained in the human spirit, as some other vicious propensities. Cassian notices that the love of money is usually "contracted from without" (*contrahitur ab extrinseco*). It sleeps in a man's soul until something external awakes it. The young, as a rule, are free from the love of money. It takes hold of a man in middle life and grows and hardens as he gets older. The real cause of the development is that deliberate solicitude for self which comes upon a man as he attains maturity. In his younger days he was probably selfish enough; but it was a selfishness which was to a great extent unknown and without reflection. As years go on and a man encounters his disappointments, and gradually arrives at the

conclusion (which in his youth he was loth to admit) that nothing will ever be done for you except by yourself, the worship of self takes a more definite shape. Instead of being a vague and floating shape, just sufficiently seen to cause a passing emotion, it becomes something a man lives with, an idol. Living with it, he must either try to break it in pieces or he will worship it. The service he usually gives it is the grasping of money. In money lies security, respect, comfort. For the sake of these things he will become avaricious. Then he will come to love money for its own sake. And the love of money makes a priest, more or less, indifferent to his profession, to the good of souls, to brotherly love, to obedience. It will harden him against the poor, against his superiors, against his spiritual duties, and it will make real affectionate prayer impossible, causing the heart to shut itself up against all sweet and wholesome influences, human or Divine. May Jesus, in His poverty and His abandonment, inspire us with the longing to keep the poison of avarice out of our souls that it may never separate us from Him and from His love !

The third vice that robs a priest of the glory of his dedication is self-indulgence. It is a temper of mind and of heart which, I need not say, is responsible for a long array of sins and imperfections. Let us see how fatally it spoils the priest's consecration. The priest's consecration implies that care, that alertness, that solicitude against profane intrusion, which we can imagine in the glorious days of the great Temple. How the watchmen guarded it ! How the Courts were daily swept, the long

porticoes kept beautiful, the numberless lamps ever burning! How hushed and silent were the approaches to the Holy of Holies! What order, vigilance, zeal, and discipline were everywhere to be seen—and how the august building, within and without, gave evidence of being nothing less than the House of God and the gate of Heaven! Thus is it intended to be with the priest whom the Lord calls, sets apart for a terrifying ministry, comes down upon with His glory of visitation and claims for Himself. Solicitude, vigilance, activity, courage, devotedness; these should be the character of the priest's response, and without these the Temple will be open, unguarded, neglected and profaned. Yet observe here how self-indulgence blights and kills all these qualities—qualities which, we may be sure, the young priest, after his ordination, knew and felt to be part of his equipment by the very grace of his appointment. No sooner, however, is he secure, his college course finished, his right to wear the Mass vestments indisputable, his status and his future more or less safe, than the same tempter that ruined Eve, and has been at the work without cessation since, whispers in his ear that there is no reason for being so hard upon one's self. Then he begins to shorten his prayers, to let the dust gather on his books of study, to sleep longer, to think about his eating—God grant it may not be to slip into the habit of drink!—to seek for amusements, to take up with undesirable sporting friends, to read sensual books, and to relish female society. Then he grows by degrees more and more selfish—studying his comforts, shirking disagree-

ables, worrying servants, annoying his brother priests. Then he gets to hectoring the flock, hardening himself to the poor, losing the priestly promptitude in sick-calls which God loves and blesses, falling into unpunctuality in his services, and putting off the long-suffering flock with empty twaddle or tedious scolding instead of preparing the Word of God.

How is a priest, inspired by the desire to amend, and anxious to recover—how is he to brace his spirit up, to rid himself of the fatal poison of self-indulgence? I always presuppose that he must resume the habit of serious and earnest meditation. That being taken for granted, it may be said that the secret of self-devotion (the opposite of self-indulgence) is to strive to carry out one's duty, to the minute and the letter, all through the day. It is not very profitable to make schemes for the future. Moreover, there is no nostrum or charm that will work a change in a man's spiritual or moral fibre, and alter his sloth into self-sacrifice. Serious meditative prayer, and especially the loving contemplation of Our Lord's Life and Passion, will be found to be very effective. But the effect they will produce is this very resolute grappling with details of which we are speaking; an effort which we can promote to good purpose by fixing our resolution and will upon it. The spirit of self-indulgence is not always a spirit of deliberate self-indulgence. It is very often a laxness, an indisposition to stir, a feeling of laziness, combined with a habit of not realizing a duty, and a vague idea that we will do it some time or other. The opposite impulse—of

promptness and generosity in all that we owe to God and to our neighbour—may be cultivated as distinct habit of the soul. It may be cultivated quite apart from the particular virtue or good work for which we are called upon. Whether it be our rising in the morning, our meditation, our Mass, our study, our pastoral calls, our rejection of certain recreations, or our turning away from certain temptations—there is a way of doing the thing unhesitatingly, on the instant, with the loyal fervour of the soldier, with the calculated impulse of a man of honour and character. If we have any concern for our spiritual soundness, we should make up our minds to cultivate this loyal and generous spirit. It is the true priest's spirit. God gives Himself to us so lavishly, that no other response is possible. It is the great safeguard of our dedication. Would that we could rouse ourselves to the resolution of giving ourselves entirely to God! This is "conversion." This is that "good-will" so often mentioned in Holy Scripture. It is not a vague fervour—although it takes its rise in the stirrings of compunction and the kindling of Divine love. But it looks for the very first chance of acting; that disposed of, it is ready for the next; and without any comprehensive scheme of life, with many breakdowns, with many short-comings, it advances step by step, hour by hour, through the days God grants it, ever mindful that as the rule of life and the schedule of duty unrolls itself and discovers a fresh point and article, that instant must the servant of God respond to God. Faith and Grace should make this possible, and not too hard; and

the same Lord and Master Who gives the Priest his consecration, will lend His loving help.

Points of Mental Prayer.

As at the end of the discourse on the "Office and Holiness of the Priest."

XIII. THE HOLY MASS

The Blessed Sacrament occupies a large place in a priest's life. So it does, indeed, in the spiritual life of every believer. The Council of Trent calls it *Effusio divitiarum Christi*, the outpouring of the riches of Christ (Sess. xiii, c. 2). The word "riches" here stands for that supernatural Grace—that elevation, ennobling, and help—which comes to us by the Incarnation and the Precious Blood. It is in the Blessed Sacrament that this is chiefly poured out upon the souls of Christians. The Holy Fathers often have this thought. St. John Chrysostom says that it contains "all the treasure of God's Beneficence"; St. Bernard calls it the *umbra Christi*, the shadow of Christ in which sit all those who desire Him, referring to the passage in the Canticles, "I sat in the shadow of Him whom I desired, and his fruit was sweet to my palate; he brought me into the cellar of wine; he set in order charity in me" (ii, 3, 4). And St. Thomas describes the Holy Eucharist as the "greatest of the miracles of Christ." Whoever, therefore, is Christ's follower—whoever believes in the Incarnation, and desires to save his soul by Christ's Blood, is largely concerned with the Blessed Sacrament. But priests, besides this, are the Ministers of the Blessed Eucharist. It is for the sake chiefly of the Body and Blood of Christ that their unction, their dedication and consecration, is given them. A priest, therefore, may

be said to be set apart for the Blessed Sacrament. If he fails to appreciate it, to reverence it, to love it, and to direct his life by it and towards it, he fails in his essential vocation. *Quid enim bonum ejus est, et quid pulchrum ejus, nisi frumentum electorum, et vinum germinans virgines?* (Zach. ix, 17). What is the good thing of Him and what is His beautiful thing, but the corn of the elect, and wine springing forth virgins? These are the words of the ancient Prophet, foretelling the abundance of the riches of the New Covenant. How good and how beautiful is that which the Lord will give His people—the wheat of the elect, the wine bearing virgins; that is the mystical wheat and wine in which the Christian people is to grow strong! It is that good thing —that lovely thing which the priest has to understand, to live with and to love.

As priests—as men with immortal souls to save —we cannot be too deeply convinced that the Holy Eucharist is the grand means of coming near Him spiritually—of effecting that process in our souls which is called a "union." Now union means a greater or less similarity of purpose, of aspiration, and of action. This is what we are created for; to aspire to God, to work into our being God's views and ways, and to express them in action. Left to ourselves we should have found this a very long and up-hill business. It was to make it easy that the great sacramental dispensation has been instituted. When God assumed a human nature, that blessed Humanity naturally had the power and gift of diffusing around it, wherever it was present, that peculiar attraction—the "drawing" which is

expressed in the Canticles—which made men lowly, obedient, pure, devout and lovers of suffering. His speech, His glance, His touch, His very presence, were the natural vehicle of a Divine transforming influence, the effect of which is noted over and over again in the New Testament. As He could not, without inconvenient miracle, remain to the end of time as He was during the thirty-three years, he instituted the Sacramental system, and left it to the Church as a legacy. Hence, in all the Sacraments, the sensible is the vehicle of the Grace of the Redeemer. And one effect, at least, of that Grace is a certain out-pour of Grace upon each of the manifold powers of man. That is, in the Sacraments we not only receive the Grace to desire virtue, or to force ourselves to acquire it—but virtues are given. This it is that shortens our attempts at conforming ourselves to Christ. Now the Holy Eucharist is the grand sacrament of Union. This is the common phrase of the Church and of the Fathers and Doctors —Union. As St. Thomas says, the Holy Eucharist is *de Christi absentiâ solatium singulare* (Opusc. 57), and he gives the reason *Cum datur in cibum, datur in omnimodam unionem.* When it is given as food, its end and purpose is the strongest possible Union. And this, let us observe, is the form in which Our Lord Himself expresses the Grace and effect of the Holy Eucharist: "He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood abideth in Me and I in him" (John vi, 57). Christ in me—I in Him! This is the formula of the Sacramental effect of the Blessed Sacrament. What does it mean? First that, in the Sacrament worthily received, the holy and power-

ful personality of Jesus our Redeemer comes into contact with the being of a man, into a nearness that did not before exist. It is a contact of power or "virtue" in the scholastic phrase; faculty affects faculty; intellect affects intellect; will touches will; holiness seeks room for itself; humility and obedience flow in like a tide; love and piety penetrate like the morning sunlight. Christ is in us like a diffused aroma, influencing, bracing, intensifying, sanctifying all the springs of spiritual life, and even natural life. It is difficult to put any limit to this all-embracing union of Jesus with the soul and heart, except that of a man's own receptive action; if a man responds, Jesus stints not His communication. Next, I in Christ! How can a man enter Christ! Again, by his powers. To enter Christ is to know Christ, to love Christ; it is to feel Christ, and to cling to Christ. When a man enters into Jesus Christ—remember the phrase is His, emphasised and oft repeated—he grasps Christ with every power, he penetrates Him with a keen appreciation and an intimate knowledge, he places all his impulses in the rush of the ever-flowing storm of Christ's virtues, he experiences the transforming force of Christ's ceaseless force. The more consciously and intensely he strives to do this, the better; part of the Grace of the Eucharistic Contact is to increase this consciousness and intensity; but even in the imperfect, even in the far too perfunctory Communions of day after day, the poor weak heart enjoys a touch of this Eucharistic Grace, and enters into Christ, as Christ enters into him.

The Eucharistic union is best summed up in the central union of will with will, which is accomplished in the very citadel of man's being. There is produced, for God's servants, that grace of devotion —that strong and stable will to be all for God and God alone: that grace which is independent of mere feeling, but which sometimes inundates the inferior powers—powers which throb and burn. Then there is what is called sensible devotion. But it is not essential. When the soul's intellectual, human, spiritual will is acted upon by the power of the Body of Christ, then there is Union—just as if a swiftly rising eagle caught in its grip some aimlessly drifting lesser bird, and bore it up out of sight in the sky. O mighty Sacrament! O strong power of my Saviour! Can it be that I, who receive Thee so often, am still so little like Thee? Let me think of this. In my thanksgiving after Mass there should be frequent and most reverential realisation of the union between my poor heart and that of my Saviour, which is the due and proper effect of the Sacrament. There should be welcome. There should be the giving of thanks. There should be solicitude to take full advantage of such a visitation. There should be a leisurely quarter of an hour (at least) of serious prayer, deepening that surrender, that generous determination to live for God alone, which Holy Communion so certainly produces in all but hardened hearts.

To pass now to consider the Mass.

The plain and literal truth about the Mass cannot be better expressed than by the words of the Council of Trent: *Quod si necessario fatemur, nullum aliud*

opus adeo sanctum ac divinum a Christi fidelibus tractari posse, quam hoc ipsum tremendum mysterium, quo vivifica illa Hostia, quâ Deo Patri reconciliati sumus, in altari per sacerdotes quotide immolatur . . . (Sess. xxii, *Dec. De Observandis*). It is the holiest, the most Divine work that the Catholic Church has to do with. It is a Mystery that can only be called "tremendous." It is nothing less than the immolation, day by day, of that life-giving Victim by which we are reconciled to God. As St. John Chrysostom says to the people, "When you see a priest offering, do not consider that it is only the priest, but look more attentively and see the stretched-out hand of God" (*Ad Pop. Ant., Hom.* 60). Or, if we may use St. Bonaventure's well-known phrase, "Not less doth God seem to do, when He deigneth to descend daily from Heaven upon the altar, than He did when he assumed human nature and became incarnate" (*De Instit. Novit.* p. 1, cap. 11). Thus the Mass is the daily direct and immediate interposition of God on earth, to work a wonder of beneficence which can only be paralleled by His Incarnation. Who can doubt, says St. Gregory, at the very end of the Dialogues, "that at the moment of immolation, when the priest utters the word, the heavens open, and that the choirs of Angels are present at that solemn act of Jesus Christ—that Heaven and earth intermingle and the highest is joined with the lowly" (*Dial.* iv, cap. 58).

Of this ineffable action of the Infinite God, the priest is the true minister. Although God does it all, yet the priest also does it. And it is not merely his hand or his voice that operates, but his rational

nature, his will and intelligence. He is bound, therefore, unless he would insult and despise God, to bring himself up to some understanding of this tremendous act, so that he may be filled with due reverence, may make a fitting preparation, may exercise his awful ministry with a clean heart, with devotion, and with edification, and may make the most of the superabundant benedictions which flow from it for himself and for others. He should always have before his eyes those grave words of the Council of Trent: *Quoties hujus Hostiae commemoratio celebratur, toties opus nostrae salutis exercetur; nimirum, uberrimi illi cruentae Hostiae fructus per hoc incruentum Sacrificium ad nos manant* (*Cat. Conc. Trid.*, cap. iv, 78). This, and no less, is the priestly ministry—to dispense the mysteries of God; to cause the Precious Blood to flow afresh; to make that church, that altar, where he celebrates, as truly a gate of Heaven to the Saint and the sinner as if they stood by the Cross, or spoke to Jesus as He hung dying.

O priest of Jesus Christ, dispenser of His Mysteries, do you not see that you absolutely act the part of Christ? Do you not see that your presence is Christ's presence, your touch is His touch, your word His, your act His bloodshedding? No wonder you are abashed and overwhelmed! No wonder you cover your poor humanity with mystic vestures, in order to distinguish the priest from the sinful man—the imperfect mortal from the august minister—the weak being of flesh and infirmity from the delegate of God, armed with more than an Angel's might! No wonder you set apart a holy

and terrible place, consecrating it with solemn rites —that you erect a stone, an altar, and pour on it the mystic unction—that you burn the symbolic incense, light the lamps of faith, and surround your ministration with ancient ceremonies and the prayers of the Saints of old. No wonder you spread out the finest linen, and try to provide the most precious vessels. Above all, it is no wonder that you bow down your heart, that you pray for forgiveness, that you go up to the altar as to the presence of the most august of Kings, and stand before it as before the Cross of Calvary ; all other things shut out, every motion subdued to reverence, and every power intent on the work of which you know you are so little worthy. Yet also it is no wonder if you rejoice and exult in your supreme vocation—if you make the holy Mass your first and chief concern ; if you look to it to begin and sanctify every day ; if you weep when a day happens on which you cannot celebrate ; and if you consider the Mass the greatest work and office of your life.

A priest, therefore, should look upon the Mass as his chief sanctification. " There is no doubt," says St. Alphonsus, " that the Holy Eucharist is a gift bestowed in a special manner on priests (" *Dign. and Duties*, p. 213). And in another passage " He who offers the Holy Mass every day with devotion will always receive new lights and new strength from God. Jesus Christ will always infuse increased knowledge and consolation ; He will encourage Him, and grant him the graces that he desires " (*Ib.* 225).

In the first place, all that has been said serves to assure the priest that as the Mass is his principal

office, so it may be, and ought to be, his chief grace, help and support. If the Mass is the renewed outpouring of the Blood of Calvary, is it likely that its salutary streams will pass by the minister who causes them to flow ? May we not be sure that the Lord and Master who honours the priest with such a charge, such a weight of responsibility, such a royal prerogative, thinks of him—of his soul, of his welfare, of his eternal salvation—even first and foremost. To all the faithful the Holy Eucharist is the spring of fervour, the destruction of evil passions, the pledge of union with the Sacred Heart. To the priest it should bring a deeper fervour, because the priest's mind penetrates deeper into what it is. To the priest it should be a more perfect purity and detachment, because he should feel more deeply than others that it carries with it the purity and detachment of Jesus. To the priest it should carry a more perfect and absolute pledge and grasp of oneness, because the priest already stands so near to the person of Jesus, and is so intimately associated with Him in His Office.

Besides, to the priest, the Holy Eucharist is not only the Blessed Sacrament—it is the Mass. The peculiar participation of the priest in the Mass is the participation of perfect worship, and of perfect propitiation ; perfect worship towards God, perfect propitiation and sacrifice towards men. Unless the priest goes through his Mass with the most lamentable negligence, he cannot help fitting or adapting his heart and soul to the expression of such worship and such propitiation. Now, worship is the positive side of holiness ; it is the active, living, elevating,

loving side of that purity which holiness brings. To worship is a great privilege—I was going to say, a precious secret. Most men worship very little. They use words; they have their feelings; they ask, they beg pardon; all these things are good and necessary. But to worship—or, as the Holy Scriptures often call it—to "praise"—is more rare with them. It is a marked duty or office of the priest. "Blessed are they that dwell in Thy House, O Lord; they shall praise Thee for ever and ever" (Ps. lxxxiii, 5). This special beatitude of the priest is chiefly realised in the Mass. Let him say his Mass, and he cannot help being a worshipper, a man of praise. Let him say his Mass well, and he easily lifts his soul into that region of rarer and purer prayer which is the highest expression of human saintliness—for in the Mass he shares in the perfect worship of Jesus Christ. He also shares in His propitiatory Sacrifice. Next to the direct love of God, holiness finds its strongest expression in sacrifice for others. The priest, in the Mass, necessarily puts on and wears the sacrificial robe. He may not physically or mentally suffer. But, if he says Mass well and worthily, he feels the throb of the victim-spirit. The acts, the words, the character of Christ which he bears, the ceremonies, the very garb of the altar—all stimulate him to enter into the part of a victim for others. He offers for his brethren, he mediates for his brethren, he lifts up his hand and bows his head for his brethren; and in the very action and heat of the great Sacrifice, the words *pro vobis et pro multis*, "for you and for many," can hardly fail to leave in his spirit a strong

impress of the super-abounding charity of Christ, to whose flame and storm his being is at that moment so near.

These are some of the effects on the human spirit —on the priestly heart—of a Mass devoutly celebrated. But we must remember that as St. Alphonsus insists, the power of the Mass to obtain for us whatever graces we *ask for* is, and must be, unique. "A priest may feel assured," says St. Alphonsus, "particularly after the Consecration, that he will receive from Jesus Christ all the graces he asks for" (*Dign. and D.*, p. 225). Let the tempted remember this! Let the weak, the tepid, the slothful, the indifferent, if they are ever visited (as they are) by aspirations after a better life, remember this! Let the Pastor in his disappointment and his heart-breakings, remember this! Let the young priest, with his sacerdotal unction fresh upon him, and his trembling anxiety that he may never be unfaithful, remember where he can confidently pray for what he needs!

And there is yet another way in which the Mass is the priest's sanctification; I mean, by the efforts which a priest of good-will is induced to make in order to say Mass worthily. All priests, unless their perceptions are seriously dulled, instinctively feel, for example, that it is a mockery to celebrate daily or often, unless you are a man of considerable prayer. The Office must be piously and regularly said; or else there is an uneasy feeling that you are treating Jesus Christ with a certain boldness, or impertinence, in presuming to stand before that awful altar. Then, the duty of saying Mass exacts,

in the details of daily life and conversation, a certain reserve, aloofness, and delicacy, which is what we mean by priestly circumspection. Further, the knowledge that we are to say Mass undoubtedly causes us to be more particular about sin, and about those unworthy condescensions of the spirit and relaxation of purpose in matters of purity, temperance and free speaking, which are with difficulty distinguished from sin. Moreover, in order to say Mass well, a magnanimous mind is stimulated to read and to study—liturgy, history, mystical theology, dogma and ceremonial. Besides this general effect on a priest's life, each day's horarium feels the influence of his Mass. He must get up in proper and decent time. There *are* priests, it is lamentable to have to admit, who may be said to rush from their bed to the altar. The respectable priest will give himself time to say his prayers—to make his acts of sorrow for sin, to stir up his affections, to direct his intention. In the very act of celebration, he will be reverential and edifying. Mass, to the pious priest, is a great growth and deepening of his faith. He is reverential because he believes, and his belief is increased by his reverence. "Irreverence" as the Council of Trent says "almost implies impiety" (*Irreverentia quae ab impietate vix sejuncta esse potest.* Sess xxii. *De Observandis*). So reverence implies piety, and piety grows with each day's reverent celebration. And a priest with a conscience and a generous mind can never forget what he owes to those present when he celebrates. "A Mass said with devotion," says St. Alphonsus, "excites devotion in all who are

present at it; but, on the other hand, a Mass celebrated with irreverence destroys devotion, and even faith, in those who are present" (*Dign. and D.* p. 222). There can be no doubt that in a parish where there is only one priest, and he is accustomed to say Mass in a hurry, with slovenly manner, amid dirt and distractions, the very faith of the people degenerates into a sort of superstition; they come to Mass because they are afraid to stay away; but there is very little religion in it. Speaking among ourselves, it is really striking and amazing how wanting in recollection, in respect, in decent behaviour, are many priests when saying Mass. There is, first of all, the point of haste or hurry. I again quote St. Alphonsus: "It is a fault worthy of reprehension, or rather, it is a horrible sacrilege, to celebrate Mass too fast, for then the words are mutilated, and the ceremonies are performed either before or after the time prescribed; this is scandalous to those who are present" (*The Holy Mass*, 201). There is a point at which hurry becomes a mortal sin. It may not be easy to define, in any given case, the exact time at which hurry and precipitation become gravely sinful. But there is no doubt that, speaking in general terms, gross irreverence, extensive clippings or omissions of words, especially in the Canon, and very unbecoming or ludicrous gesticulation, constitute, each of them mortal sin—a "horrible sacrilege." I am willing to suppose that most priests stop short of that. But is it not a patent fact that many priests say Mass with a recklessness, and a carelessness which, to a non-Catholic would indicate that they did not

believe in what they were doing ? If you or I saw a Protestant curate go through his Communion service as unconcernedly as some of us say Mass we should think ourselves justified in holding up such a fact as an instance of hypocrisy—of a man practising what he did not—could not—believe in. Yet we do this kind of thing. And what is still more strange is, that good priests are, in this respect, much to blame. Priests, in other respects worthy, zealous, and God-fearing, are found to celebrate with a rapidity and a cool unconcern which are nothing less than surprising in them. In my opinion the reason of it is found in the familiarity induced by constant repetition, and in a certain aversion to make use of the exertion required for precision, accuracy, and deliberation. In justice to such priests it must be admitted that their apparent rush through Mass by no means always implies distraction, much less any contempt. Sometimes it arises from character and general manner. Often it is only their business-like way of disposing of a duty which is most sacred, indeed, but which has ceased to affect the surface-emotions of nature. But they would recognise, if they would only reflect, that it is an obligation, not indeed to feel or to show emotion, but to be exact and deliberate ; that the bystanders cannot read their hearts, or make allowance for their outward indifference ; and hence that they are bound to make an effort to evince, in a modest manner, their real piety and devotion. They should strive never to show hurry ; to avoid a too loud, bold, and reckless tone in reading the prayers ; to perform the ceremonies accurately and smoothly ;

to avoid ungainly gestures, groanings, breathings, and mutterings. Above all, they should never take liberties at the altar; such as addressing someone, showing irritation, or recklessly knocking things about. At the same time, they should not be too short or too long; neither should they (even if they feel it) make extraordinary demonstrations of devotion.The Mass of a pious priest should be a careful, modest, simple, unaffected performance of a ministry to which no powers of man can do justice. How fruitful of good results are such Masses! How they nourish and cherish faith in the people! How they draw the faithful to the Holy Sacrifice! And how they edify the stranger, often leading him to seek the true Church! There is nothing more important for a young priest than to set himself, from his very ordination, to acquire a devout and edifying manner of celebrating. Bad habits cling to one through life; they are broken off with the greatest difficulty.

One of the greatest safeguards to a priest in his devout celebration of Mass is to have a fixed and unalterable rule to make at least a short immediate preparation, and at least one quarter of an hour's thanksgiving. St. Alphonsus says: "It is a very great fault to say Mass with little or no preparation; it would be worse to talk while putting on the vestments" (*The Holy Mass*, p. 201). These are the words, in a passage usually attributed to St. Bonaventure, used to express what a priest must avoid if he would say Mass reverently; he must not come to his Mass "tepidus," "inordinatus," or "inconsideratus." The two last are clearly intended

to explain what he must do if he would avoid that horrible "tepidity" which is the besetting reproach of so many of us who are priests of the living God. "Inordinatus"—"inconsideratus." He must use his powers of attention and reflection before Mass. "Ordo." His interior powers must be used, just like his hands are to prepare the chalice and to vest himself; there must be inward preparation like there must be external. "Consideratio." The heart must look, and see, and consider well. Ah, my Redeemer, if I had now to appear before Thy judgement seat, what good account could I render Thee of the numerous Masses that I have said, and of the years during which I have been a priest! Delay a little, O Lord; do not judge me! *Non intres in judicium cum servo Tuo!* Prolong my life still awhile that I may weep over my ingratitude and amend! (*Holy Mass*, p. 320).

Points of Mental Prayer.

1. Place before your imagination Our Blessed Lord celebrating the Last Supper. Look at His longing desire. "With desire I have desired to eat this Pasch with you before I suffer." Why does He desire it? He wants to change the hearts of His disciples, and of all men, into the likeness of His own heart. For this purpose He will not merely instruct them, preach to them, or be an example to them; but He will institute a Sacrament, and that Sacrament shall be His own Body and Blood. That most precious Sacrament carries with it the special gift of that union which He describes in the words: "I in my servant, and he in Me."

Adore the Giver of the greatest of good gifts. Adore the Sacred Humanity, using all Its powers to sanctify your soul. Thank your Friend and your Father for this crowning proof of His unceasing solicitude.

2. Imagine that you hear Him say the words "Do this in memory of Me." He says them even to you. The robe of the Priesthood is cast over your frail humanity. You are associated with your Saviour in the stupendous Act which for ever offers to God a fitting homage, makes the Precious Blood to flow afresh, and draws down upon men every grace and blessing.

Bend your head beneath this holy charge. Protest to him, in words of sincere confession, that you are not worthy. Yet accept, with humility, with joy, and with confidence.

3. Resolve that your life shall be henceforth more worthy of your Mass. (1) By horror of sin. (2) By love of prayer. (3) By preparation and thanksgiving. (4) By priestly circumspection of life. (5) By every effort to say Mass in a truly edifying manner. (6) By frequently explaining the Mass to your people.

XIV. THE CROSS.

THERE are two tempers of Christian life—the self-seeking or easy, and the self-sacrificing or ascetic. The latter is ours,because of Christ's teaching and by the Christian tradition which has become a kind of instinct. Not that we have any superstitious love of the hard as opposed to the easy. It is not a preference for Suffering for the sake of suffering. It is simply that our spiritual philosophy tells us it is best for us. Look at Jesus. His life was a life of suffering. And we know that it is a condition of our friendship—our intimacy with Jesus—that we should take up our Cross and follow Him.

I do not counsel austerities. There is suffering enough—inevitable suffering—in this life of ours. But, as followers of Christ, we must definitely adopt the ascetic side—chiefly, however, by the acceptance of sufferings as they come and ordinary mortifications such as are imposed on us by our state of life. As priests, we are called upon to practice self-restraint to an exceptional degree; for example, to restrain the tongue, avoiding language and talk which, though pardonable perhaps and passably decent with a layman, lets a priest down, and makes one suspect in him a reckless, unrefined heart; or to restrain the temper, any exhibition of which, though only venially sinful, besides that it disturbs the life of Grace, is selfish—selfish, in that it hurts others and interferes with the care of souls.

Then we are required to practise Renunciation to an exceptional degree; renunciation of certain pleasures, reading, and recreations; certain company, certain glory even, as occasion offers; which, though some of them are lawful, even laudable, for others, are not compatible with the priestly vocation. And this we must do always and on principle. Then, there is required of us the spirit of obedience—acceptance of frustrated desires, obligations that may be tiresome to us, or trying; the daily Office and the rest. We may also be called upon to endure ill-success, mortified vanity and unfair treatment; to avoid places and persons and occasions, partly because of their danger to ourselves, but partly also for the sake of example to others. Here we have pain, inconvenience, tedium and "slavery"—if we may use the expression. Moreover, we must expect bodily pain and serious mental troubles; we can hardly hope to escape them. Our practice is to dread them, shirk them, scheme to avoid them. They make us ill-tempered, sour, defiant, reckless. Yet Our Lord looked upon such sufferings as a holy "baptism, wherewith He was to be baptised," for the greater perfection of His spirit and His work. These things we should try to love, use, and by means of them draw nearer to God. This is elementary. It is the common duty of a soldier of Christ.

When a priest takes up his Cross to follow Christ, he is faced with three forms of self-denial: Obedience, Poverty, and Mortification. It is a remarkable thing in the Life of Our Lord that, next to suffering, Obedience is its chief characteristic. St. Francis

of Sales says: "He was pleased to mark its observance on the whole course of His life." Even His suffering was a part of His Obedience. Why was this so? Obedience is the abnegation or suppression of soul and will. Why was this His choice for *His* will? His was the most beautiful of all souls, the most holy of all wills. We can answer that Obedience is, in one way, more remarkable as a discipline or perfection of the Spirit than suffering, and that He wished to teach our poor imperfect wills what is best. If the Son of God obeyed, what can be so good for us as obedience? We have continual lessons in Holy Scripture showing how for want of obedience men's worship and work were unacceptable. No fasting, no lifting up of the heart to God without obedience is of any use. St. Thomas says: "There is nothing better for a person than to subject his will, for Christ's sake, to the will of another" (*2a, 2ae*).* Why? Because the suffering of obedience turns the heart promptly and constantly to God; there is more fervour in an act done thus for God's sake than in the same act not done from obedience. It is a killing, an emptying, of self. Separation from God is loving self, trusting self, putting self forward, labouring for self. Obedience finds God, leans on Him, gives the heart to Him. It is, in consequence, the secret of charity and of victory. If it were only as an exercise of the heart and reason and soul to suppress self, Obedience would be worth recommending. But there are many other advantages of Obedience. First, there

* Nihil majus potest homo Deo dare, quam quod, propriam voluntatem propter Ipsum voluntati alterius subjiciat (*Summa, 2a 2æ, Quaest.* clxxxvi., Art. V., *ad quintum*).

is *direction* or *order*. We should often do wrongly if it were not for Obedience. It means to us the guidance of the Church, tradition, superiors, and custom, all directing us, keeping us and, as it were, steering us in the right way to Almighty God. Plenty of people require that. To decide for ourselves : " Is this right for me ? Shall I take up this ? Shall I give up that ? " loses us a lot of time and causes anxiety ; and then, we may not do what is best when we see it ! We are saved from all this. We cannot calculate or understand the great benefit to us of this peaceful direction of our lives without trouble and anxiety. We are enabled to do so much more easily what Almighty God requires of us and to be in His company, occupied with Him. But Obedience is one of the great powers in the Church, not merely as an ascetical virtue, but as a means of unity. Priests and pastors work for the salvation of souls. What would be the effect of everyone being His own master ? We see how it is with non-Catholics when they make missionary efforts ; each follows his own inspiration, all have different aims and adopt different means. But the army of the Church is made *one* by holy Obedience. God blesses it as " an army set in array (*Castrorum acies ordinata*) and a great work is done for souls. Here, however, we should observe that for Obedience to be a virtue the essential requisite is that it should be the outcome of a spiritual condition. This condition is what we call Humility.

Humility is the most elusive of sentiments. It is not the saying that we are and have nothing. We are something, and we have a great deal. St. Bernard

defines it as "the virtue by which a man who has come to know the very truth of himself treats himself as of no account" (*Humilitas est virtus quâ homo verissima sui cognitione sibimetipsi vilescit*). It is the recognition that all we have is given by God, maintained by God. But it is more than a mere cold recognition. It is a warm, delighted, and affectionate acknowledgment, in which both reason and will, and, as far as possible, feeling enter. Hence, it is well described as, in the first place, the truth; in the second place, the contempt of self; in the third place, the attributing all to God. It is when the heart, forgetting, whether wilfully or not, what is its relation with God, swells with complacency at the consideration of what it is, has, or does, that there arise pride, vanity, ostentation, contempt of others, ambition, etc. Now the heart is always inclined to this—like the spring that must have weight on it constantly, or else it jerks back into its place. It is not always very sinful, but it is sinful to dwell on and to encourage.

It is recognised that there is no effective preservative of Humility other than humiliation. And among humiliations Obedience is one of the chief and most effective. "There is nothing so profitable to the soul as to obey," says St. Augustine (*Nihil tam expedit animae quam obedire*). Therefore Obedience, if really accepted, is a most powerful purification of the spirit, and helps marvellously to keep the heart in complete union with God.

Hence, our greatest anxiety should be to love, to desire Obedience. In our priestly life, Obedience is a light yoke. Superiors are timid (and with reason);

laws are general, and we are largely left to ourselves—as to study, work, time, recreation. This is, to some extent, a misfortune. To feel the yoke more would draw us nearer to Christ. But at all events, where Obedience comes in, let us welcome it. No man can be a safe priest or Religious unless he resolutely keeps before him, and cherishes, the supernatural view of Obedience—viz., the delight in trampling on our self-sufficiency, our vanity, our ambition, and bringing our beings under the rule and leadership that God has given us. This Obedience should, in the first place, be *prompt*. We must be sure that it is a ready Obedience—that there be no outward resistance, no insolence, no grumbling, no criticism. Those who make it difficult for Superiors to command, war against the Kingdom of God. Then it should be *intelligent*. Let it be as exact as we can make it, at the same time remembering that details are often and rightly left to ourselves. Yet we should be scrupulous, in a sense, so as not to make the command void. St. Bernard's rule was to do the thing with a willing heart, with a glad face, and as quickly as his feet would carry him (*Volenti corde, laetanti facie, veloci pede*). And St. Benedict says that "Obedience will be then acceptable to God and pleasing to men, if what is commanded be not done timorously, slowly, coldly, or with murmuring, or an answer showing unwillingness" (*non trepide, non tarde, nec tepide, aut cum murmure, vel cum responso nolentis*). Next, it should be *acquiescent*. Our Obedience, no doubt, is not imperative like that in the army, or in business, where we "obey, but know it is all wrong." We

should not be too ready to think it is "all wrong." Yet it may be our duty—a real duty—to make representations or to appeal against an order. Usually, if it be not a sin, the virtuous thing is simply to carry it out. It is certain that even the foolishness of superiors is blessed by our Obedience. Lastly, let us make our Obedience a deliberate exercise of Humility. We may find it very hard, in serious matters, such as the administration of a mission, or the exercise of our office, to accept the interference of orders from a superior. But it is in the submission of mind and will and heart that the merit of Obedience comes in, and by it we are brought nearer to God.

The virtue of Poverty is an element of the Priestly State, and required of the priest, from his Dedication to God—*Dominus pars haereditatis meae; Pars mea Dominus.* We are to be "contented with God." We cannot begin to take up our Cross and follow Christ without practising this sort of self-denial. Now the Poverty of Jesus shows us the danger of possessing, of the self-satisfaction of having and holding, of the self-sufficing assurance that we have something to stand by, something to fall back on—*non movebor amplius.* Hence Poverty is, first of all, a safeguard—a rampart against that fatal lifting up which is incompatible with loving God with our whole heart. And, secondly, it is a restraint, and therefore a suffering, which turns us to God.

Its great end and purpose is to starve the spirit of *Proprietorship* (self) and to throw us upon God as our Father.

St. Benedict commands, in his Rule, that the vice of Proprietorship be cut away by the very roots" (*radicitus amputetur*). This stern command, and the severity of the ancient monks, generally, in this matter is explained partly because Proprietorship breaks up a Community by destroying equality; but also because, like rejection of Obedience, it is another form of self-assertion, and therefore of escaping or breaking away from Our Heavenly Father. I need not, however, dwell on this point. It is enough here to remind ourselves that, as I have already said, Priests, even Monks, are sometimes very grasping. They come to love money for its own sake. Let us think of Christ and remember that perfection is to become like Him even in His Poverty. Let us accept the inconveniences of a priest's life in living, lodging, recreations, and the rest. Let us carefully keep, on these points, such rules as Superiors give us or the Ecclesiastical statues ordain. There should be no extravagance in dress, no worldliness in rooms, no expensive pets, no excessive entertaining, no squandering on vacations, and, more particularly, no harshness as to fees, and no ragging the people for money.

We have yet to consider the third Cross that the priest takes upon himself in order to walk in the footsteps of Christ—Mortification. The use of it, or philosophy of it, is partly to correct and partly to suffer. There are Necessary Mortifications—keeping the Commandments, avoiding mortal sins and all proximate occasions of mortal sin; these I need not speak about. And there are Mortifications of Counsel---self-imposed Mortifications which we

adopt for our correction or our advancement towards perfection. I do not attempt to give advice in this matter. But I would like to say that we are not obliged to do the most mortifying or perfect thing in small matters. This is not unfaithfulness to Grace, but *good*—on the reflex principle that it is better not to be too anxious in things that are not of precept. But this does not apply to rule, or to obedience, or to anything that is clearly a duty—like that of avoiding venial sin, even at the cost of suffering and self-imposed penance.

St. Bernard, commenting on the Conversion of St. Paul (*Serm.* 1 *in Conv. Sti Pauli*), says that St. Paul sinned in ignorance, and was forgiven. He then goes on: "Beware lest any one consider it to be a little thing to sin knowingly in anything however small. Let no one say in his heart, These things are slight, I am not going to try to correct them; it is of no consequence to remain in these venial and little sins. This is impenitence. This is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit—the blasphemy that cannot be forgiven." Theologians may discuss whether it would be a mortal sin to propose to avoid Mortal Sin only—or even to propose to commit all possible or practicable venial sins. Their views would not seem to coincide with that expressed in this striking passage by St. Bernard. We often hear from the mouth of a priest, very broad assertions as to the need of avoiding venial sin. But whatever may be the speculative truth, practically it would be impossible for a person who was deliberately in the disposition to take no heed of venial sin to avoid mortal sin. This is probably what St. Bernard

meant. A disposition of this kind would mean that in the soul there existed a temper of laxity, of self-indulgence, of weakness, of small-mindedness, of atrophy of the moral fibre which would be fatal before long.

Perhaps, since we were clothed with the holiness of the priesthood, we have not sinned, or not often sinned, grievously. But let us see if we have not been—if we are not at this moment—in serious danger on account of our laxness and proneness to sinful gratification.

(1) Do we not treat Almighty God with great freedom ? For example, in our saying Mass, in our preparation for it, in our thanksgiving ; in our hurry and off-handedness ; in celebrating with stains upon our conscience ? Or again, in the way we say our Office ? Or in the way we make our Confession ?

(2) Do we not live in an atmosphere of personal indulgences ; as to food, sleep, drink, lodging, smoking, idleness, novel-reading, recreation, familiarities ?

(3) Have we not a rooted aversion to a rule of life ?

(4) Do we not habitually criticise Superiors and others, and speak recklessly of people's sins and faults ?

(5) If we have temptations against faith, arising perhaps from our dabbling in modern literature which is above our power of dealing with, do we pray and increase our piety ?

(6) Are we not sadly callous to others ; to our flock, to the poor ? Are we not contemptuous,

unpunctual, bitter in speech, careless of scandal to priests younger than ourselves ?

It is in matters like these that we can test ourselves and see whether or no we are on the down incline. For venial sins arise from tepidity and thicken tepidity ; and with increase of tepidity, Grace naturally becomes scanty. The generous temper is the only safe temper. We are not obliged to weary ourselves with watching against venial sin. We are not obliged to choose the more perfect course, in things not evil. But we should often renew the offering of our whole heart to God. We should treat seriously all deliberate sin, even venial. We should determine to break ourselves of any habit of venial sin that we may have contracted. We should pursue, by serious thought and prudent action, the great Christian lines of humility, purity, diligence, kindness and mortification. And, finally, even in our newest falls, we should turn promptly, simply, and humbly to God for pardon.

Points of Mental Prayer.

1. Place before you the picture of Christ upon the waters, beckoning you to step out of the boat and trust Him. How strong He is—how decided—how absolute : no plank or rope to comfort Him : the cheerless water all He has to walk upon. His servant must be equally resolute, equally trustful —then he will find safety, ease, and peace.

My Lord and Master, I am a poor weak being. But I recognise the greatness, the nobility, the all-conquering power of Thy Cross. I welcome Thee as the model of all human beings ; I thank Thee for

Thy Suffering : I long to imitate Thee. And chiefly, I long that I may reproduce in myself Thy admirable choice of the Cross ; Thy absolute choice of suffering everywhere, at all times and in all things. Give me Grace to rise to this in my feeble way.

2. Jesus, then, holds out the Cup—canst thou drink ? O my Jesus, how often have I said I cannot ! How often have I shirked, schemed, or at least forgotten that I was the follower of a King crowned with thorns. I pray Thee to grant me piety, that I may rally to Thy side and effectually make Thee my Master. Grant me the holy and salutary spirit of austerity, which all Thy Saints have caught from Thee. Grant me regularity, and all its accompanying self-denials ; sensitiveness to purity, and all the constant renunication that goes with it ; grant me solid and sane supernatural views, that I may follow Thy Gospel and not the self-indulgence of too many Christians. Grant me fortitude and courage that whatever I may have to suffer I may never turn away from Thee.

3. If I cannot, all at once, bravely take up the Cross, let me at least recognise, despise, reject, and take means to crush out, my love of ease and comfort . The love of comfort is, practically, an instinct : an element of nature. Indulged, it is fatal to obedience , poverty, kindness, regularity, chastity. What I must do is to stand firm against this fatal instinct ; to reason on it ; to consider what I am to Christ ; to refuse to go by it ; in practice, to go counter to it, at least in everything that is sinful ; to curb that fierceness that fights for rights,

possessions, and advantages; to be content with "extremitas" and "vilitas."

O my Saviour, I have been on the wrong road! No wonder I have made no progress in prayer or spiritual living. Fill me with the Spirit of the Cross, that I may at least begin to stumble after Thee—trusting to Thee to lift me up when I fall.

XV. PASTORAL WORK

"As the Father hath sent me, so I also send you" (John xx, 21). The uplifted Hand endows—marks—sends. He, the Almighty Father, endows certain of His creatures with gifts—"Receive ye the Holy Ghost, whose sins ye shall forgive, they are forgiven them"; He marks them with His unction; He sends them—"Go ye into the whole world and preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mark xvi, 15). Hence the human Priesthood—men who have been in all ages set apart—and set apart for Christ's work. "Woe unto me if I do not evangelize" (1 Cor. ix, 16); if you do not evangelize, you should not have pretended to that unction you have received.

God loves to bring men to His feet. Nature He has at His bidding and absolute command, but men's hearts! "As I live, saith the Lord. . . . Behold all souls are Mine" (Ezechiel xviii, 4). But He has endowed those souls with free-will, and they turn away from Him. He is the "Lord who lovest souls" (Wisdom xi, 27)—all souls with no exception; every living human being of the universe and the long centuries. St. Clement of Alexandria saw human nature like a great song or Hymn, the articulate voice of the work of His hands, sounding for ever the praise of God, its Creator. Our Heavenly Father sees in man the crown of creation, His most perfect work, but, more than this; as St. John Chrysostom so often says, He sees in man the being

for whom God became Man and died upon the Cross. St. Augustine was fond of saying "When He said *Sitio*, *da mihi bibere*, He was thirsting for the Faith of the woman. . . . And when He again said *Sitio*, when hanging upon the Cross, He was crying out for the Faith of those for whom He had spoken, saying, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'"

Because of this love of souls, we have God in human form, with a wilderness of perishing men around Him. He is among them—not afar off in Heaven—and thirsting to affect them. He is the reaper in the midst of the hot harvest. How will He do it? It will not be by self-assertion or self-vindication. He is there not to dominate as a Master, but to seek as a servant. He went to and fro like a poor preacher, obedient to the civil authorities, respectful to priests—except when He had to speak plainly and rebuke them as false pastors, wolves in sheeps' clothing—in painful journeying, incessant speaking, daily instruction in the Synagogues and on the hill-sides—the ever-thankless trouble of seeking souls and drawing them to Himself. As St. John Chrysostom points out, He put no trust in money or legislation to further His cause, but trusted only to supernatural methods; He preached Grace, taught morality, showed them the love of God and, in His own person, offered them an example of self-denial, prayer, obedience, humility, and suffering.

Let us contemplate Our Lord working. We see Him, first, in the Holy Family at Nazareth, deigning, with St. Joseph, to do rude work, menial work,

work of the hands, unconsidered work by which no glory and no renown was to be gained, work for His daily bread! Must there not be some healing balm in work, some golden reward? The proverb says: "The soul of those that work shall grow fat" (Prov. xiii, 4). Why should God give abundance of heavenly Grace to workers?

Our Lord would seem to reply—The work of man is the expiation of man. It is part of the Kingdom of the Cross, because it means humility, obedience and pain.

Next, look at Him in His ministry. He sits fatigued at the well—tired with His labours; the harvest is so great and the labourers so few. The Samaritan woman comes and, unmindful of His fatigue, He not only begins to instruct her, but He exerts His Divine gifts—of reading the heart, prophecy, illumination, life-giving Grace and charity—to bring her back to God. All His ministry is like this—utterly without care for self, with the needs of the poor first always in His thoughts, and the needs of the sinners first always in His heart; a ceaseless, untiring work by day, and the night spent in prayer.

Now, the priest is Christ's representative among His people and the priest's work is Christ's work. In a very true sense, every soul has to consider for every other soul—especially those in contact with it, its neighbours. The interests of a soul are God's interests. But the priest has the further obligation of consecration and dedication to this service. He is sent to do the work that Christ did. Priests, therefore, should work in unity—"as," says Our Lord,

"Thou Father in Me and I in Thee, that they may be one in us." They must be helpful, therefore, to each other, with one interest and one combined work; superiors showing forbearance, considerateness, affection, and esteem to their subjects; subjects abstaining from quarrels among themselves; always putting the best construction on what they hear of one another; carefully avoiding bitter words; never doing or omitting anything to prevent reconciliation and keep the peace; avoiding cabals —that is, unofficial and unconstitutional joint-action, yet taking all constitutional means (by vote in council, by advice, by representation to superiors)—to correct or reform where correction and reform is needed; backing up their present superiors in every way they can; and, in their own troubles, to be silent, to suffer and to pray. God's blessing is always on a work of obedience, done in silence, suffering, and prayer.

Fraternal Unity and Brotherly Love are mutually dependent on one another, though they are not exactly the same thing. There can be unity of purpose and effort without charity, but without charity, we are nothing. Let us think of this and remember that, by God's appointment, Brotherly Love is a measure of our grace and our success. Our Lord said: "Judge not and you shall not be judged; condemn not and you shall not be condemned" (Luke vi, 37). We do not often offend against fraternal charity in act, but we do in speech. There is too much idle talk among us. We are not guiltless, at times, of rash judgment—when we make up our minds to a man's fault, whilst we are

sub-conscious that we *ought* not to be so sure of it. A man is bound *to see the good side* of everybody, especially of a superior, a brother priest, or a person in authority. Detraction (not to speak of calumny) is not usually a grave sin among priests. But it might be in persons of certain temperaments; as when a priest, following a rather common worldly fashion of gossip, imputes serious faults or hints at scandals in another. And let it be a rule with us to avoid the bitter word which can never be recalled or forgotten. On the positive side of Brotherly Love, let rectors be always considerate and helpful and patient and encouraging with their curates. If there be a question of forgiveness for omissions and faults, let it be generous and lasting. Or if they be called upon to re-instate a curate after complaints have been considered, let the past, as far as possible, be forgotten.

"The Holy Synod hath decreed that all those who, in any manner soever, hold any parochial or other churches which have the care of souls, shall, at least on the Lord's Day and solemn feasts, either personally or, if they be lawfully hindered, by others who are competent, feed the people committed to them with salutary words, according to their own capacity and that of their people, by teaching them the things which it is necessary to know unto salvation, and by announcing to them with briefness and plainness of discourse, the vices which they must avoid and the virtues which they must aim at, that they may escape everlasting punishment and obtain the glory of Heaven" (*Conc. Trid., cap.* 2, *De Ref.*). This is the chief

Pastoral work, next after the administration of the Sacraments. On this point I wish to commend to your attention the following passage from La Rivière (*Hamon* I, 462). He is speaking of St. Francis de Sales : " I had the happiness of assisting at this hallowed (*béni*) Catechism ; never did I behold such a sight ! The good and amiable Bishop was seated upon a kind of throne on a slightly raised platform ; the army of children surrounded him. It was an inexpressible delight to hear how familiarly he set forth the rudiments of our Faith. With every sentence the most apt illustrations seemed to flow unpremeditated from his mouth ; his eyes were on his little hearers, and theirs upon him ; he made himself a child to them to form within them the perfect man according to Jesus Christ. After having explained a point of doctrine, he made sure they had taken it in, by asking questions, first of one, then of another, and putting the point in different words ; and when he saw that his explanation had not been perfectly understood, he would give it in another form, illustrating it with stories or examples, and developing it so that no one could misunderstand ; and he spared himself no fatigue or sense of weariness in the instruction of his beloved little ones. With a mother's gentleness, he would go back to his question, would repeat and repeat the same explanations, always with the same grace and the same piety, never leaving a point till it was learnt. He seldom or never scolded ; he rather encouraged ; and when a child gave him satisfaction by his answering, he would give pictures, medals, rosaries, little prayer-books, or other pious objects,

which he always had with him at the Catechism, to reward the deserving.

"At the conclusion of the Catechism, he would make them sing, either hymns in the vernacular, many of which he had written himself, or verses of the Psalms in French, set to music by professors of music; and then he distributed to the children leaflets written by his own hand, containing a summary of Christian doctrine to be committed to memory against the next Catechism. The grace and simplicity with which the holy Bishop explained the deepest mysteries of faith excited the deepest interest in the faithful who were present at the Catechism, enlightened the simple, edified the instructed and did good to all."

Another pastoral work of the Priest is conversion. "Other sheep I have that are not of this fold; them also I must bring." There is nothing Our Lord desires more than to bring all to the Church; because, otherwise, they would never turn to God, they would not have the help of the Sacraments, they would be deprived of the Holy Eucharist, there would be with them no sorrow for sin. Protestants are perishing. They may be in good faith; but they are unfortunate in any case. He suffered for them as well as for us. Numbers of non-Catholics, if not under the influence of false teaching, would make good Catholics. A priest that should be indifferent to conversion would be no servant of His Master.

I have already spoken of priestly zeal, but as the conversion of the country is our great work, I will return to it. It is a strange and disturbing fact that

so little progress is made. No doubt the fault is in ourselves. "God's arm is not shortened, that it cannot save" (Is. lix, 1).

First, then, are we not wanting in devotion to the Blessed Sacrament? This is the Fire on earth He came to enkindle. But His desire depends for its fulfilment upon men—especially priests. Therefore, to begin with, our Church and sanctuary should be always clean, adorned with evident care, the lamp always burning, the altar always ready for sacrifice, the Church always ready for worshippers—in spite of the dirt brought in by poor congregations. Then the Mass should be daily—regular, even if there are only one or two worshippers; we should instruct servers and not dispense with them. (Of the priest's manner and devotion when saying Mass I have already spoken.) High Mass on the Sundays is the correct thing; it should not be too long; and if not sung, there should be yet a certain solemnity distinguishing it from the week-day Mass. There should be Benediction once or twice a week; a personal visit to the Blessed Sacrament at night or at noon; night-prayers, also, where possible. Then the priest should often preach, or rather, allude to in preaching, the Catholic Faith in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. He should urge and promote frequent Communion.

Secondly, it should be remembered that the priests who make converts are the priests who are reputed holy. This is a strong reason for gravity, piety, and circumspection. A priest who consorts much with seculars, and behaves as they do, is not likely to make converts.

Thirdly, we should give non-Catholics opportunities to hear the truth—not by preaching *controversial* sermons, but by plenty of well-considered explanations. There should be a room, handy, for people to come for instruction.

Fourthly, we should also try to keep our own people. This is not only necessary in itself, but also as a means of conversion. Enlist their sympathies in this great work and ask them to promote conversion by their decent lives and good example.

Fifthly, remember that a priest who makes converts is sure to be a man of prayer and alive to the supernatural life.

We should never, amid all our troubles, lose sight of the work of conversion. With the great English middle and lower-middle classes, respectable, Christian and conservative, the work seems almost hopeless. It was the martyrs more than words that brought about the conversion of the Roman Empire. I sometimes think that the hard life of our missionary priests will thus be rewarded. With the British democracy I am far more hopeful. It does not contemn priests. What it wants is information as to Jesus Christ and the Sacramental system. Unfortunately it never comes to church. This is the justificatiou of going among the people to preach. But we want stable churches, too.

Sixthly, a priest, to win souls, should be unaffected, accessible, good-tempered, orderly and punctual. To be unaffected, he should think of his visitor, not of himself. To be accessible, he should have fixed hours, but capable of expansion. To be good-tempered, he should look to his language and

be orderly ; there should be a time for everything and everything should be to its time. Unpunctuality is fatal.

Seventhly, a priest should beware of being in the hands of favourites. Nothing causes more distrust or irritation.

Yet, when there is no success, let us not be cast down. We cannot compel, we can only take the means to induce them to come into the fold. The hour of conversion, perhaps, has not yet come. The number of the martyrs is not yet full. Persevere ; accept failure ; offer your disappointment. Be sure that our prayer, or work done in obedience, or suffering, falls into the ground. It will bear fruit somehow or sometime. And every single conversion is a little centre of Catholicism—a point that radiates and helps on the good work.

Points for Mental Prayer.

1. Consider Our Lord preaching on the mountain-side. He had compassion on the multitude ! O my Saviour, fill me with that compassion ! Make me understand how sad Thy heart is when a soul is lost ! How Thou desirest that Thy word, Thy labour, Thy Blood, should benefit every creature !

2. Observe the circumstances of Our Lord's preaching. It never ceases in season or out of season. It approaches people—seeks them. Yet it seems to fail. My Lord, let me learn to seek all, non-Catholics as well as Catholics. May each day of my life see me speaking, or instructing, or working, or suffering ! But may Thy holy will be blessed now and for ever !

3. Regret what has been unpriestly in your past life, your idleness, your failings as to Charity. Ask pardon for your impatience, boasting, negligence and depression.

XVI—THE MONASTIC PROMISE.

(For Benedictines).

Let us consider our Monasticism.

The Monastic state is a great word, full of grand associations. It brings up before our minds a great deal of history—the deserts of Egypt and Syria, during that great century of freedom and fervour, when young men poured out of the rotten Greek and Roman cities to seek God, with the barren sands under their feet, the far horizon around them, the steely skies and the stars above their heads—the purple hills and water of Subiaco; Monte Cassino, lifted up over the plain; the march through Europe of the Rule of St. Benedict; the subjugation of the barbarians and the planting of the waste; the glorious abbeys of the Middle Ages; stories of apostolate, of holy office and song, of sacred learning, and of calm and peaceful cloisters.

We bear the name and the habit of the monks of the greatest days of Monasticism. If we are honest, we find in our hearts two sentiments: first, we are proud of the past; second, we are somewhat impatient of the present. We would boast of the historic past, and claim its glory; but we often feel it irksome and disagreeable to undergo the fatigue and the self-denial of the present moment.

I say that if we earnestly wish to give our whole heart to God, to draw near unto Jesus as He would

have us draw near—then we must value, love, and study our Monasticism.

A man who has made vows, if there is anything in him at all, appreciates them more and more the longer he lives. In this, our English Congregation, many young men take their monastic vows without feeling them. They have all along been in the practice of obedience, poverty and chastity. They look forward to their studies, their teaching, their work on the Mission. They enter on their monastic life as on the career of an active British priest. To their view, in those early years, Monasticism is hardly the inheritance or staple of their lives ; it is rather an adjunct or a circumstance. But, of course, the time arrives when obedience has to be reckoned with, and poverty—our vows ; when over and above all priestly duty, there is question of religious obligation. One's work, one's opportunities, successes, failures, health, advancing age—any of these may bring a Religious face to face with his vows and with the obligation of living as a monk, even when he can be no longer a missioner. It is to the credit of the rank and file of English Benedictines that they nearly always face these obligations with good will. No doubt, most of us, from our youthful beginnings, had within us, deep in our breasts, more of the monastic spirit than we were conscious of. But the chief reason why a man grows more of a monk the longer he lives is that he has the sense to recognise, with increased clearness, how great a blessing it is, and has the grace to follow out such convictions. The mere lengthening out of his life may tend to produce this feeling ; the maturing of one's in-

telligence, the seriousness of life, the approach of death. I have known many, on the confines of old age, when they were still strong but no longer young—sound-headed, upright, and straight men —express their consolation and joy in these holy vows and the bonds that bound them to St. Benedict.

Monasticism is the state in which we bind upon our backs the sweet yoke of Jesus Christ. All men must take it up and bear it. But Monasticism binds it upon us with the triple cord of our vows. Hence Monasticism places us in a "state" of life. We have such a state figured for us in the eighty-third Psalm. The writer sighs for Mount Sion and the Temple of the Lord. We do not know who he was or the epoch to which he belonged. But it was someone kept away, by war or captivity, from Jerusalem—perhaps in the time of Sennacherib, or in the Babylonian captivity, or in the days of the Maccabees. And, though an exile, he belongs still to the service of the Temple. "How lovely are Thy Tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts!" (*Quam dilecta, tabernacula Tua, Domine virtutum*), he cried out. "The courts of the Lord" (*atria Domini*) are to him what the cloisters are to the monk. The "altars of the Lord" (*altaria Tua, Domine*) are his home—as its house is to the sparrow (*passer invenit sibi domum*), and its nest to the turtle (*et turtur nidum sibi*). He longs to get back to his true state of life (*Beati qui habitant in domo Tua*); to climb the heights of perfection set before him (*ascensiones in corde suo*), in the valley of tears (*in valle lacrimarum*); "in the appointed place" (*in loco quam*

posuit); and with the blessing the lawgiver shall have given (*etenim benedictionem dabit legislator*); he will go from virtue to virtue (*de virtute in virtutem*) until he shall come to the vision of God (*vide bitur Deus deorum in Sion*). Then he resumes his prayer: "O Lord, God of Hosts, hear my prayer: give ear, O God of Jacob. Behold, O God, our Protector and look on the face of Thine anointed." For, as he says, "better is one day in Thy courts than a thousand elsewhere" (*melior est dies una in atriis Tuis super millia*); "I had rather be a doorkeeper in Thy courts than dwell in the tents of sinners" (*elegi abjectus esse in domo Dei mei, magis quam habitare in tabernaculis peccatorum*). "O Lord, of Hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee."

This Psalm should inspire us with love of the Monastic State. It shows us the grandeur and beauty of this temple or palace in which we live, with God for its Founder, gathering us in, present perpetually in our midst, where all profane things are kept out (that is its holiness), where the soul finds strength and joy and peace.

Our vows are means to get near and keep near to Almighty God, to be always in His Presence. What separates us from God? Our pride, our self-love, our desire of things and creatures, our self-indulgence. The vows of the monastic state cut off and keep at a distance all these things, and so make the drawing near to God more complete, more easy, more perfect, more uninterrupted. We dwell as in a camp. In an ordinary house one is exposed to the attacks of any marauding band; they can enter by the doors and windows. But in a camp there are

ramparts, one row, or two, or three. The enemy must scale all these before he can enter. Our vows keep temptations at a distance (though *self* is with us always and can never be shut out). The worst temptations (such as people fall by in the world) we have voluntarily cut off. We dwell surrounded by ramparts. We are in a state, a stable condition. We carry it with us wherever we may go. It is not as though we had made a resolve, merely, but we have put ourselves in a position it is difficult to get out of, a holy difficulty ! There is no better sacrifice to Almighty God. It is a sacrifice which directly tends to make sure of the lessons of Nazareth. We want the interior life ; the monastic sacrifice is the way to make sure of it. Next to the sacrifice of the heart it must be the most pleasing, the greatest sacrifice; indeed, this extra sacrifice is for the very purpose of making the sacrifice of the heart more complete.

It is a life of contemplation to which our vows bind us. The religious state is always one of contemplation, more or less. The life is made up of the continual service of all our powers to Almighty God. This contemplation is a powerful means of carrying on the Church. Prayer and contemplation bring about the success of apostolic men in the field of the Church ; they avert the wrath of God. All this is secured by the Monastic life, meditation, Prayer, Divine Office, Mass, and so on. Thus our vows have the effect of making the Christian life more intense as well as more safe. We are bound to love God with our whole heart, and we take the means by which we do it more completely and continuously. We cannot thank God enough for calling

us to do here on earth the same thing that we shall do for ever and ever, with Him. What is the essence of the Monastic state? I answer that it is Obedience. In the Monastic state we must love obedience, especially as a supernatural means urged on us by Christ. We must rejoice in opportunities of Obedience. We meet with Religious sometimes who spend their lives in "shirking." A man says: "I will take care I am not put upon." Now, the Religious who is really anxious to draw near to God, to give himself to Him wholly, will be anxious for occasions to obey. He came for that—to be exercised in obedience so that self-will might be emptied out of his heart. "The more I obey, the more I feel the yoke; the more I find occasions for obedience, the better for me." Bring yourself up to that. Wish, pray, long that you may constantly obey. In a certain sense, some persons who are living under a Rule are inclined to be their own masters if they can. If an order comes to disturb them, it is a distinct disturbance, and they do not take it well! This is utterly counter to the Monastic idea—the more observance the better. But I do not mean to say you are to go to your Superior, and say: "Pray give me some more obedience." I think it is quite enough to obey the restrictions and commands that come to you. Some Saints have gone further and importuned their Superiors to give them more obedience. I would not expect or advise anyone to do this; unless grace carries you very far, it might lead to falsity and scruples and trifling. Take what comes. Be exact to every little rule; be strict in obedience, even to the customs which are time-honoured, good

and holy. Be ready when special calls on obedience come. Cherish the idea that *you have come for this.*

Next, your obedience must be *bona fide.* Some Religious obey to the letter, but not in the spirit of the command. Do your best to carry out the intention, not as if acting to the outward eye alone. There is a sort of spitefulness in us that makes us say: "He told me to do it and I will do it," and then we do it in an awkward way so as not to fulfil the exact point and purpose of the order. Even in sweeping a room there are two or three ways; there is the careless, supercilious way, obeying to the letter, not to the spirit, and there is what I call the *bona fide* way.

Then, we have always been taught not to *discuss* obedience, not to criticise Superiors. This is one of the most important things in religious observance. I have said several times, and I hold, that nothing brings the curse of Almighty God on a house like criticising Superiors and murmuring. "Your murmur," says St. Gregory," is not against us, but against God" (*non contra nos est murmur vestrum, sed contra Deum*). There is always a way to obey. Nobody believes Superiors are absolutely prudent and infallible; the Superior would be the last person to say so. But when you have taken lawful means to express your difficulty, you must not do any more. The lawful, constitutional way of expressing difficulties is always open to every Religious. You say quietly, plainly, humbly, what you feel to the Superior or the proper persons. This is in order. But beyond these lawful ways, to talk apart, discuss and criticise!—here the wrath of God comes

in ; He visits it upon you. It is absolutely evil. The soul is quite upset, full of self, full of struggle, disunion with Almighty God, recklessness ; a state very much opposed to the sacredness of Christian and religious life. It is bad for the community as well. Numbers are led away. Such an example is very catching, and you never know where it stops. Never speak in public against Superiors or ordinances. By " in public " I mean never speak to anyone to whom you have no right to speak. If I said never speak to *anyone*, to any prudent person, to any official, I should be asking too much of you. It would be too much to expect you never to go to such a one to be comforted. Yet, I don't know—why should you be comforted ? Why not be strong and take things as they come ? But to come to the Recreation-room, to meet three or four there and begin to talk against Superiors, is to do the devil's work in the monastery. This is just what *he* wants to do, to upset and break up and divide the community. If a house is divided against itself how can it stand ? Every Religious who is disloyal digs, as it were, into the foundations. Only God's love, and perhaps the merits of others who are better, can prevent disruption when that sort of spirit creeps in. Mind, you must not too easily admit the imprudence of Superiors. Try as much as you can to think the Superior right. You say " The thing is foolish. It is impossible to subject my intelligence to think otherwise." I do not know that it is. You see two or three reasons ; you are short-sighted. If you saw a little further, the reasons of the " foolishness " would disappear. Almighty God may wish

the foolishness of Superiors to send a blessing to the house. St. Teresa once was ordered, by undoubted revelation, to make a foundation. The Confessor said "No, it is imprudent at present." Later on, God said to her that she was to do it, and that this time it should succeed better than it would have done before, because she had obeyed. Very often, a thing may seem, here and now, imprudent, but by God's blessing it may produce good of a *higher* order to outweigh the particular loss. I do not see why persons cannot always obey and subject their intelligence in making a reflex act like this. To submit intelligence is harder than to submit will. You say: "I obey, but, of course, it is very silly." This is a rash thing to say! Almighty God watches specially over Superiors and desires to work good through obedience. I will add that sometimes obedience is very hard, especially hard. Recognise then the pressure of the holy yoke; give yourself to obey with all the fervour you can. For some particular temperaments, especially if they have indulged in criticism for many years, the only way is to take the supernatural view and obey indiscriminately, no matter who the Superior is. It may be a subordinate Superior, or one in charge of some particular work whom you are sent to help; there also obedience comes in. The more obedience you have the better; otherwise you are not fit to be a Religious.

Points of Mental Prayer.

1. Place yourself in the presence of your Saviour calling you. He lifts up His wounded Hand. He

points to you, He calls you. To what ? To a perfect life, to the inner circle of His children, to the Religious state. See, once more, His loving solicitude. You know very well how sweetly and strongly He has called you—by early association, in innocency of life, or in the fervour of your conversion to the Faith, by your love of the Divine Office, or of the monastic home. His call has been very sweet and strong ; perhaps it sounded for a long time ; it has taken shape ; you are here.

(1) Adore the mighty word of the calling God, as if Angels had come down and led you in. (2) Thank your Heavenly Father for all His invitations and inspirations towards your state. " Thy word was a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." All my life it has guided me and led me here.

2. Take the holy yoke that He offers you. He holds out to you His own—the yoke He is carrying Himself. It means Obedience, Poverty, Common Life, brotherly kindness. Tell Him, if you had it not already, you would wish to take it now. Offer your will to be healed and purified by Obedience.

3. Ask pardon for your shortcomings, for your regrets, perhaps. Very dangerous these are indeed. Trample on them. Be sorry for all shortcomings. Be sorry for having withdrawn yourself to a certain extent from Obedience. Be sorry for not loving Obedience, for shirking it, for not obeying properly, for doing harm by criticising Superiors. Regret all these faults with great fervour during this holy time of Retreat.

XVII. PERSEVERANCE

We now come to the subject of Perseverance. Perseverance means spending every day well. Once we have given our heart to Almighty God, turned away from grave sin, have confessed and have made an efficacious resolution about occasions of sin, Perseverance is simply a question of spending each day well. Some people trouble themselves and say: "Oh, I may do my very best, but perhaps I may not have the grace of final perseverance." "Perhapses" are not to be reckoned with, as you know. Almighty God loves us, He is solicitous about us, there is no reason why we should not persevere. He wants to give us the grace of final perseverance; it will be our own fault if we do not receive it. Try to manage your good resolutions. The Grace of God will not be wanting to you. Live every day as if it were to be your last day.

It is a great pledge of final perseverance to live a life of rule and observance. Make it a point never to cut short or put off, without necessity, your spiritual duties. A rule of life is a form of worship. But St. Bernard says of it: "It is a delightful burden, a sweet weight, a load, yet a welcome one" (*Onus delectabile, suave pondus, sarcina salutaris*). He says again: "Be always solicitous about the custody of order, and then order will keep you" (*Soliciti semper circa custodiam ordinis, et ordo custodiet vos*). Keep your rules and they will keep

you. This is what Perseverance means. It is *love*, because by it your heart is purified, and your spirit united with Jesus in His love and Passion. The holy routine unveils the secret of Divine Love. You find out these secrets in your daily life.

You have the Sacraments. I am afraid that some priests do not put a sufficiently complete trust in them. The Sacraments are mighty engines of the power of God exercised upon your heart by means of the Precious Blood, which is poured out in Confession and the Holy Eucharist. Use them for what they are intended, namely, to give daily help and strength. The Sacrament of Penance should be regularly used and with a certain amount of attention. Always consider whether your act of Contrition is sufficient. Confession is the least part of the Sacrament. Be sure of your Contrition, that is, take the ordinary means to secure Contrition and sorrow, not extraordinary means, every time you go. This is the great requisite. If slackness comes in, if you are so hasty as not to lift up your heart, I do not say the Confession is null and void, but there would be danger. Then, what a means of perseverance you have in the Holy Mass. There is a great outburst of devotion to the Holy Eucharist just now. We see the wonderful effect of frequent Communion in our flocks. I think this is a great manifestation of Almighty God's power in the Church. As men are taking away material resources and government recognition, He pours out this Grace of devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, which will always keep men rallied round the Chair of Peter. Never

miss saying Mass, and this for the sake of your own soul as much as for the sake of your people.

Now I will say a further word about sins. It generally happens that one fall upsets all good purposes and resolutions, and brings down with a crash all the scaffolding of a spiritual life. I do not wish to make light of deadly sin. But this is quite certain. Our Heavenly Father is waiting, longing, to welcome and pardon a penitent sinner; even if there were ten thousand sins. Think of David, sitting between the two gates near a tower on Mount Sion, waiting for tidings of the battle. Absalom, his son, was in arms against him. Yet, as one messenger after another appeared with tidings of victory, he kept saying: "Is the young man Absalom safe?" And no one dared speak plainly, but he found out at last, and the cry went up: "My son Absalom; Absalom my son; would to God that I might die for thee, Absalom my son, my son Absalom." So it is with our Heavenly Father. His thought, His anxiety is for us. He does not ask: "Is My honour vindicated, My glory avenged, My authority upheld?"—but "My servant, My son, My priest—is he safe? Will he come back to My feet?" It is of vital importance, therefore, never to lose confidence when we fall. The reason we do is that we never attributed our good thoughts and works to God; there is always the implied persuasion that our own strength is the cause; so, when we fall, we are like a man who finds his weapon go to pieces in his hands. If a fall brought us to confide in God and God alone, it would be a *felix culpa*; for it would furnish us with a spiritual

principle that would carry us through to Perseverance.

Deliberate Venial Sin is not only perilously near to Mortal Sin, sometimes, but it tends to break down the horror of sin, which is a great safeguard to the soul. We shall fall pretty often, but be careful that this is never deliberate venial Sin, and avoid contracting a habit of deliberate venial sin. What shall I give you for an example of deliberate, venial sin? Vanity, showing off, ostentation, ambition, spite, dishonesty, eating and drinking too lavishly and unrestrainedly, or expensively, familiarities, suggestive reading, luxurious and easy habits, temper, unkind words, swearing, moroseness, unfairness, idleness, sitting up too late, rising late, omission of meditation, hurry over the Office, putting off too late, want of order and punctuality. . . . Sometimes there is deliberation, no doubt, and if we take no pains to correct these faults, we are liable to get into a habit—and some of these sins are perilously near mortal sin—near to the chief sins of sloth, pride, and the rest. There is a temper of deliberate sin that begets coolness to our Heavenly Father. These things must be fought against. Fasten on anything deliberate; never rest till by humility and prayer you have repented of the deliberation. We shall fall, of course. Some people are very discouraged when, after a Retreat, after good resolutions, they find in a day or two they are nearly as bad as ever. Never let a fall upset your good purposes and resolutions. And do not forget the help you will receive from the Sacraments of Confession and the Holy Eucharist.

Pray, of course, for Perseverance. But you need no set form of words. We pray constantly for it in the Liturgy and Breviary—"that we may come to an eternal reward" (*et ad vitam perducat aeternam*); "that Thou mayest never permit us to be separated from Thee" (*a Te nunquam separari permittas*); "that we may be carried to contemplate the presence of Thy greatness" (*usque ad contemplandam speciem Tuae celsitudinis perducamur*); "May Thy Grace never leave us" (*Gratia Tua nos quaesumus Domine non derelinquat*); and every day in the hymn of None *Praemium mortis sacrae, perennis instet gloria.* These are prayers for perseverance. And Christ wants us to persevere, and is ever on our side.

I have said very little in this Retreat about our Lady. That was because it was understood. Whenever you pray to Jesus, Mary is very near. She is intended to be the *enforcement* of Jesus. That is a phrase I use about her. She is associated with all His work, not as a Sacramental minister, but as a minister. There is no doubt that all Grace passes through her hands to come to us. Once you come to understand her position you will see that there is a great deal that shows the character of Almighty God to us in the *way* He came. Bethlehem, Nazareth, Galilee, Calvary—do not add to His mighty Redemption; but the *way* He has done it, to spread His actions all over that space of time, shows Him up, as it were, larger and nearer to us. He might have come to us without a Mother, but does it not add enormously to our familiarity with Him, and bring Him home to our minds as one of us—not on

a pinnacle out of sight and difficult of access—that He was a Child like another child, obeyed His Mother, was ministered to by His Mother, was full of all kindly human feelings such as a good child has ? We might have guessed it in a way, but now it forces itself upon us. Our Lady is the enforcement of the Incarnation ; she enforces and enhances its lessons ; she illuminates it and protects it. In the history of the Church, when the Incarnation was attacked, her position was vindicated and then the Incarnation was understood. So, by understanding her, we feel more keenly the lowly, homely aspects of God made man for our sake—the winning, transforming aspects. You will find in contemplating her prerogatives and aspects that you will understand Him better. That is her office. But do not constrain yourself or bind yourself to particular devotions to our Lady ; keep your liberty of spirit. Only, never forget her !

" O good Jesus, by the bitterness of Thy Passion, by the bitterness Thou didst sustain on the Cross especially the bitterness of the moment when Thy soul departed from Thy Body, have mercy on my soul in the moment of my departure."

Points of Mental Prayer.

1. Imagine you hear Our Blessed Lord and Saviour saying : " Take up my yoke upon you, and learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart, and you shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is sweet and my burden light." He places it upon you, in His love, His solicitude, His longing to make you His. It is the yoke of His command-

ments, of self-restraint, of regularity, of labour, of the Cross. It presses hard upon your pride, your sensuality, your sloth. Nevertheless, with humble eagerness, accept it from His hand—kiss it reverently—resolve to wear it—pray that you may never throw it off.

2. But your Saviour and your Master does not merely place His yoke upon you, and leave you to bear it. He walks with you in the way which you must tread, cheering, guarding, and helping you. Believe this. And pray that you may make a good and ample use, every day, of prayer, of the Sacraments and of the Mass. Pray that each day you may realise more and more those words: "Be of good cheer. It is I. Fear not."

3. Run through the resolutions you have made, which will chiefly relate to your rule of life and the securing of your spiritual duties.

Act of Humility.

"O my Saviour, it is not my strength that can carry out these pious resolves. Left to myself, I shall break down as I have broken down before. It is in Thy Grace alone I put my trust. O my loving Jesus, Thou lovest me; my humble prayer and resolutions cannot be in vain.

"O Mother of my Saviour, dispenser of His Grace, take into Thy keeping my frail heart, my unstable heart, my unworthy soul. Guard me, each day, each hour, from temptation. Obtain all needful and suitable Graces for me—as my life goes on—and protect me in the hour of my death."

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